1
とある魔術の
禁書目録SS
インデックス

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第①巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第一話
拘束の行方
GLEIPNIR.

CHAPTER 1

The Whereabouts of the Restraints.

GLEIPNIR.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

We have received word that a restraint craftsman named Ellasone has disappeared from his home in a craftsman district of London. Ellasone had a contract with the Anglican Church's anti-magician organization Necessarius, so if his knowledge or techniques are leaked, there is a great risk of highly dangerous magicians being freed from the magical facilities such as the Tower of London that are used to confine such villainous magicians.

Please head in pursuit of the restraint craftsman Ellasone and either put him under your protection or capture him.

Currently, it is unknown whether Ellasone's disappearance was caused by a third party or if he did so of his own free will. If the restraint craftsman Ellasone has gone off on his own based on dangerous ideas, it is possible he may attack us. Make sure to prepare for a fight in case it comes to that.

♦

A manmade city spread out within the darkness of the night.

With only sparse electric lighting in that wide open space, the darkness seemed even more accentuated.

The area was a large bus terminal.

The British capital city of London had a bus line that ran directly from the international airport. In order to service the over 100 buses that went back and forth during a day, a large space had been prepared a bit away from the center of the city. The space must have been a square about 500 meters across.

There were no signs of people in the area most likely because a people clearing field had been set up.

In the middle of that area was Kanzaki Kaori.

She had black hair that reached her waist even when tied back in a ponytail. She was taller than the average Japanese. She was wearing a short sleeve T-shirt that was tied to the side so her navel was visible and jeans that had one leg cut off all the way at the base of her thigh. On her waist, she wore a Western belt that had a katana hanging from it. It was Shichiten Shichitou. While it was a Japanese sword, it was over 2 meters long.

She ran across the vast bus terminal.

No, it may not have been right to say she was running.

Kanzaki Kaori was one of the fewer than 20 Saints in the world. A Saint was a person who had similar bodily characteristics to the Son of God which gave them a fragment of the Son of God's power. The cross used to execute the Son of God and the cross on the roof of a church were two different things. However, the latter held the power of the former despite them being two different things. It worked the same as that.

In other words, Kanzaki Kaori was not a normal magician.

She could exhibit her power as a Saint which allowed her to momentarily exceed the speed of sound.

(Kh...!!)

But even though she was using that much power, Kanzaki Kaori was unable to accomplish her goal.

Yes. If she was going out of her way to wield that supernatural power, she had to have a reason making it necessary.

For Kanzaki Kaori, that reason was the man before her.

"Ellasone!!"

She called out his name.

The magician Ellasone. That was the name from the mission instruction report. He was a craftsman who specialized in the construction of magical restraints and he was the man who had suddenly disappeared.

He was a large man. At first glance, he gave a savage impression, but an odd delicateness could be sensed in the magician's fingertips. Without speaking, he reached inside his cheap coat and pulled out multiple white charms.

They resembled Eastern ones, but they were different. They were not made of paper. They were instead made of thin cowhide that had been bleached to the point of being white. They had a few silver studs on them. The writing on them used the alphabet, but the words were not English or French. Most likely, they were rune characters written out phonetically using the alphabet.

Basically, they used Norse mythology-style spells with power from Christian cultures mixed in. Due to that, the runes were broken down into the alphabet first rather than used in their pure form.

Ellasone swung his right hand and air was absorbed by the white cowhide charms.

A change occurred.

It looked like the charms twisted and in the next instant a giant form of over 5 meters appeared. It was a giant stag beetle made of black leather and silver armor. The pincer portion had thick springs and metal fixtures attached.

It was a spiritual item.

A spiritual item was either a tool prepared in order to use magic or a tool that used magic and autonomously functioned.

"This is one way of using the Mancatcher," Ellasone said quietly.

"...!!"

Normally, the Mancatcher was a restraint where the pincer parts were attached to the end of a long spear-like handle. It was used to lock around a prisoner's waist in order to safely transport them.

With a roar, the giant stag beetle vigorously flapped its wings made of leather so thin it looked transparent. It charged toward Kanzaki at high speed.

But before its pincer could move, Kanzaki's hands moved to the hilt of her sword and mercilessly bisected the stag beetle. The sound of the slicing came a second later similar to with thunder.

That had been a drawn sword technique.

The cutting edge had been frighteningly sharp, but Kanzaki, the one who had carried out the attack, frowned. By slicing the stag beetle, Kanzaki had given Ellasone an instant of extra time. He had used that time to move to the side ever so slightly.

Kanzaki Kaori could travel faster than the speed of sound.

If a normal magician attempted to flee from her on foot, they would be absolutely unable to escape.

But Ellasone charged toward the inside of the sideways curve Kanzaki moved in. Naturally, Kanzaki was forced to correct her trajectory which brought the force of inertia on her body more than would normally have been necessary. Because she was thoughtlessly moving at faster than the speed of sound, she herself suffered the side effects of the power she was producing.

(He's getting away...)

That same thing had happened repeatedly.

She had let her guard down and the next thing she knew, he was about to escape her cordon. She almost felt as if she were being pulled by the strings she gripped in her hand. Kanzaki gritted her teeth and thought.

(But why is Ellasone attacking us and then trying to flee!?)

A high pitched metallic noise rang out.

It was the sound of Kanzaki swinging her sword. However, the sound was not that of flesh being sliced. When she looked, there was a white cowhide charm stuck to the side of the blade. That had forcibly altered the sword's trajectory leaving Ellasone unscathed. In fact, there was a wrenching pain in Kanzaki's wrist.

The sword had flown harmlessly above Ellasone's head and Kanzaki remained motionless.

They were about a meter apart.

After a slight delay, the white charm that was preventing her from using her blade was sliced in two and gently floated down.

Now that she had her sword back, would she get her slash in first? Or would Ellasone bring out some effect using the cowhide charm in his hand first? The thread of tension was spread out to its limit.

"Either way, you cannot escape from me," Kanzaki announced in a low voice while holding her blade fixed in a single place with frightening precision. "My legs can exceed the speed of sound. Even if you gain a bit of a distance, I can fill it in an instant. You are trapped within a surrounding barrier of speed."

"True enough." Ellasone nodded. "That's why I had to set something up on my end. It may have just been a coincidence, but you got close enough that I couldn't just hide behind something and wait for you to leave. To be honest, you are not who I'm after. This is a battle that did not need to happen. I feel sorry for having to do this to you."

Immediately afterwards, Kanzaki felt a chill run down her back.

Ellasone was smiling. At some point, the charm in his hand had disappeared. Kanzaki put together those various pieces of information and deduced what must have happened to her.

(He...put it on my back!?)

Ellasone was a craftsman who specialized in developing magical restraints. He was a professional at making the tools used to prevent villainous magicians from escaping from specialized prisons such as the Tower of London. If one of his truly top class items were directly put on her, even as a Saint there was a danger of her movements being sealed temporarily.

She immediately turned her focus to her own back.

But when she reached a hand there, she did not feel anything.

It had been a bluff.

Ellasone had used a mental trick to make Kanzaki think there was something there. He had likely actually hidden the charm inside his pocket.

Kanzaki frantically turned her attention forward again, but there was no longer anyone there.

He may have been moving from blind spot to blind spot or he may have used some special means of movement in the instant Kanzaki had not been looking. He had disappeared so fully that she could not even determine that.

"Dammit..." Kanzaki muttered.

It was possible a specialist in sealing people's movements was also skilled in escaping from such situations.

Part 2

"I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation."

Inside a small used clothes shop that specialized in jeans, a man in his twenties who owned the store was resting his elbows on the register counter looking bored. He looked up from the parchment spread out on the counter. The old paper was the type from the Middle Ages that did not even use pulp, but it was emitting some kind of light and had something like a small 3D map on it. However, the shop owner did not seem to care.

The young shop owner had a bored expression on his face and was resting his head in his hands as he spoke to the girl who had brought the parchment.

"...And?"

"Um, well...I am not sure what to say. I am not doing this because I want to. I am just acting as a messenger for a job from the Anglican Church, so it would be a problem if you do not accept it."

"Come on now, Miss Tour Guide."

The jeans shop owner tapped the parchment on the counter with his index finger. The blonde girl of about 15 he had referred to as a tour guide was dressed in a tight skirt, a suit, and a scarf. Her small body started trembling, but the shop owner paid it no heed.

"Do you know what this place is? Do you know what my job is? Stop this. It's true that London may be a city where if you call out to 100 girls one of them's likely to be a magician, but I don't care about all their troubles. And Necessarius is a group that still has witch hunts and an inquisition in the 21st century. I don't want to work with people like that. Don't get a normal person wrapped up in some incident covered in blood and gore."

"Huh? I thought the owner of this shop was a super unofficial agent who worked in combination with the magician Kanzaki Kaori to punish the evils of the world..."

"...What is with that wonderful double life? Please don't speak about me like I'm some kind of assassin from a drama or a movie. That makes it sound like selling jeans is just a dummy occupation I use for camouflage. This is my true occupation. I risk my life on this. Do you understand that? I may be a suspicious hitman by day, but I sell jeans in secret by night."

The tour guide girl sighed and looked around the store.

"...This is your true occupation? It does not look like things are selling very well to me."

"Is that really something you should be saying right in front of the store's owner? But I in fact sell quite well. In fact, I recently opened a site where people can order jeans over the internet. I've even got an order from a Japanese middle school girl. Her English was pretty bad, so it took me quite a while to figure out what she was trying to order. It would've been easier if she had just sent the email in Japanese."

The shop owner seemed to be checking the status of the order on his mobile device and the tour guide glanced over at the screen. It was displaying an order from a "Ruiko Saten" who was likely the middle school girl he had mentioned.

It seemed he really was getting sales.

The tour guide was honestly shocked by that, but she decided the shop owner probably would not be too happy if she stuck with that impression for too long.

Steel pipes ran across that area that was smaller than half a normal school classroom. Hangers on those pipes held various types of jeans. The truly valuable ones were displayed in glass showcases, but the tour guide had no idea on what basis the jeans' values were determined.

Then a different girl who had been looking at the jeans hanging down all that time finally approached the counter in annoyance.

Rare for London, she was a black haired Asian.

Her hair reached her waist despite being in a ponytail. She was dressed in a short sleeved T-shirt tied off at her belly and in jeans that had one of the legs cut off at the base of the thigh. On top of that, she had a belt that looked like something from a Western that had a two meter long Japanese sword hanging from it.

She was the magician Kanzaki Kaori that the tour guide had mentioned earlier.

"I'm reluctant to treat you as a partner, but I have no choice because my superiors decided on it. If you have any complaints, you can take it up directly with them."

"This is a mission on a scale where it needs the involvement of a Saint like you, right? I can tell this is dangerous. Why are you trying to drag a civilian used clothes seller into that?"

"Like I said, take any complaints to my superiors."

"And where are these superiors? I get the feeling I'd be immediately shot for being an outsider if I tried to get into wherever they are even if I was trying to seriously speak with your boss."

"If you understand, then quit complaining and hurry up and help. ...Oh, I know. In addition to the normal compensation, if we succeed in this job, I will buy one of the ridiculously expensive pairs of jeans that does not seem like it is selling."

"No. I've already decided that I'm not selling anything more to you."

"Why not!? And there's a pair that I kind of had my eyes on too!!" yelled out Kanzaki in response to her unfair treatment, but the shop owner pointed toward her bare thigh.

"The second you get a pair of jeans you chop them to pieces like that, so I'm not selling any more to you."

"Uuh, is it really that strange? This design is necessary for the construction of a spell. ...A-and what's wrong with it? I was even thinking of cutting up the side of a pair of jeans to make them a bit like a hakama."

"If you want that, then just wear a hakama!! Don't expect that from jeans!! Stone washing and cut jeans are number one on the list of things I hate most in the world!!"

"How can two things be number one?"

"I also hate when people speak impudently like that!" The shop owner turned his head to the side rudely. "I don't mind jeans having their color fade or getting scraped while being worn over long periods of time. But ruining perfectly good jeans in order to fake that is sacrilege! It's like...let's see...like finding gold decorations in a pyramid and scraping them with a brush because they'll be more valuable if they're scratched up and old looking. What value does that have? The value of jeans comes from the path that pair has walked down in the past. It isn't something you can just add on by dirtying or damaging them."

"Is that so?" Kanzaki muttered sounding downhearted.

Meanwhile, the tour guide still had no idea what gave jeans their value. Her gaze moved from Kanzaki's giant breasts pushing out her T-shirt, then to her small and bare midriff, and finally to her large ass that was wrapped in her jeans.

"So it comes from the path that pair has walked down in the past... I see, so it's something like burusera."

"I'm gonna kill you!!"

Part 3

A bit of a distance away from the center of London was a craftsman district. Gathered there were stores dealing in hats, coats, shoes, bags, belts, and anything else made of leather. Each of the stores was smaller than a fast food restaurant, but around half of the stores there held royal warrants and were secretly admired by those in the clothing business.

Apparently, the restraint craftsman Ellasone's house was in that district.

In order to track the missing craftsman, Kanzaki and the jeans shop owner were beginning by investigating his home.

The tour guide sat in the passenger seat of a small black and round car that looked like a gentleman's leather shoe. She asked a question of the jeans shop owner who held the steering wheel in the driver seat.

"Do you not admire the shops in this area?"

"I have no interest in leather."

The shop owner glanced at the rearview mirror inside the ecological electric car that looked like a classic car from the start of the 20th century.

Kanzaki looked rather uncomfortable. The reason for this was the lack of the sword that usually hung from her waist. Shichiten Shichitou was over 2 meters long. It could not fit within the small car, so it was stored within a surfboard case that rode on the roof of the car. ...The surfboard did not match the look of the classic car in the slightest, but it was better than having a sword stabbing up into the driver seat from the back seat.

The shop owner spoke to Kanzaki.

"So what's with this missing restraint craftsman? Ellasone, was it? From what you've said, he sounds like he's about my age. Are we seriously investigating a grown man who's decided to run away from home?"

"As it mentioned in the mission instruction report, Ellasone has quite a bit of classified information related to facilities such as the Tower of London that restrain dangerous magicians. Whether he ran off himself or was kidnapped by someone else, we have to avoid having that information leaked out."

"Hey, now," the shop owner said out of exasperation. "You fought with him directly yesterday, right? Doesn't that answer a lot of those questions? I saw the records of your fight. The quality of the spiritual item...the restraint he used was quite something. That goes beyond just restraining someone. That thing could crush a man's skeleton."

Suddenly, the tour guide started flipping through her notepad.

"It seems Ellasone chose a means that would finish things without having to kill anyone. If he does not struggle unnecessarily, we do not need to take his life."

"That's what you call that ridiculous strength? It would sound more convincing to say that even if he had some huge tool used to scrap old cars. ...At any rate, Ellasone disappeared on his own and he's planning something bad. That's how it looks to me."

"That could have been a fake," Kanzaki immediately responded. "It is also possible he is being controlled by someone or someone is blackmailing him with a hostage. We need to cast aside our preconceptions and consider every possibility."

When he saw the serious expression on Kanzaki's face as she spoke, the shop owner couldn't help but smile.

"Wh-what?"

"Is the official position given in the paperwork not good enough for you?" the shop owner said without losing the smile. "It looks to me like you're a little more worried about the wellbeing of this complete stranger who suddenly took a strange action. As usual, you're fighting for someone you know nothing about."

"..."

Kanzaki's mood seemed to be thrown out of order as she fell silent and turned to look out the window, but then the tour guide girl cut in apologetically.

"Um, I don't like having to destroy that scene filled with heartwarming volunteerism, but I have some information I would like for you to hear before we arrive."

"What is it?"

"Uhh, it's about this Ellasone. It seems he performed 'experiments' on a civilian girl in order to test the endurance of the restraints he created. It seems that girl was the first one to notice his disappearance because she would go to his house for those experiments..."

"...Well, that certainly doesn't sound heartwarming. To be honest, it makes me want to turn around and go home."

"We're almost there," said Kanzaki while pointing forward from the back seat. "After coming this far, we need to figure something out before heading back."

Part 4

It was a small house.

As the house was also used as a workshop, the actual living space had to be even more cramped. Or it was possible that the craftsman known as Ellasone was the type of person that did not distinguish between work and home and could not relax unless he was surrounded by his work.

"Dammit, there's nowhere to park."

"Can't you just park in front of the house?"

"The no parking areas these days scare me. They didn't get the raised budget they wanted, so they're cracking down on illegal parking to make up for it."

However, things were pretty much the same all throughout the craftsman district and there did not seem to be any temporary parking areas. The jeans shop owner had no choice but to park on the curb in front of the Ellasone's house.

Kanzaki got out of the car, entered the house through the front door, and immediately started investigating. A few of her colleagues from Necessarius greeted her lightly. Using discernment on the level of the police, they were searching for any remaining traces inside the house.

"They've looked through everything from the chars in the oven to the ashes in the fireplace," the shop owner muttered as if he were fed up with the whole thing. "These excellent people have already worked so hard. Is there anything left for us to do?"

"This way," instructed the tour guide girl.

Ellasone's house was a two story building, but it also seemed to have an attic. The shop owner's expression turned bitter upon seeing a simple ladder leading up to a square hole in the ceiling with darkness on the other side.

"Please don't tell me that girl he used as a test subject was imprisoned up there."

"It's not that grim, but still...prepare yourself."

The three of them headed up the leader and into the attic.

It was a surprisingly large area. While the other rooms were divided up into set spaces by the walls, the attic had no inside walls. However, it was not exactly a nice living space. While the space itself was large, the air was stuffy and uncomfortable.

There was a window allowing light in, so it was not completely dark.

And what that light allowed them to see was...

"God damn it. I thought I smelled something weird. I guess it's the smell of leather."

"That may be the smell of the oil used to maintain leather products."

"It's the same either way. Damn, this is like a treasure trove of bondage gear."

The overall feel of the place may have been similar to the jeans shop the shop owner ran. In order to use a set space to its maximum capacity, metal pipes were laid out near the ceiling and a lot of "clothes" were hanging from them.

However, instead of antique jeans, that attic was filled with restraints that were filled with cutting edge magical symbols and that would physically and magically seal the wearer's movements. There were simple (looking) handcuffs made of short belts that wrapped around, there were some that had two long boots to put on someone, there were some that covered the entire body like a diving suit , and there were many more strange types of restraints.

While looking at the red and black leather items, Kanzaki asked a question to the tour guide girl.

"What were we invited here to do?"

"These seem to be the items not yet used in the experiments on that girl. And there are no order forms from the Anglican Church or any other client for these items."

"...Maybe he just made them for fun."

"Nothing has been proven yet one way or the other, but the restraints here seem to have been clearly separated from the rest. You were called here because we wanted the opinions of specialists in the field of clothing." The tour guide shrugged lightly. "Kanzaki-san, you are an expert at constructing spells by combining the magical symbols in everyday objects, so is there any meaning built into these? If we can find the magical symbols in these restraints, it could serve as a clue."

"Actually, I would think this is more your field than mine," Kanzaki said lightly in the shop owner's direction. "I combine the clothing to coordinate the magical symbols I want, but I am not confident in my ability to analyze the work at the level of the thread and the cloth. ...You mend jeans too, right?"

"...God damn it. These harsh S&M goods are out of my area of expertise," the shop owner spat out, but he also knew that he was qualified for the job.

While continuing to complain, he pulled out a small sewing set that would likely make the owner seem family-oriented and well-liked were that owner a girl.

Leaving the attic to the shop owner, Kanzaki and the tour guide headed back down the ladder.

"What should I do?"

"Let's see... Our staff is inspecting the house, but perhaps you could go over things again from your own viewpoint, Kanzaki-san. You are from the Amakusa Church...Japan's Kakure Kirishitan, correct? In that case, you may be more sensitive to the symbols and traces hidden in the building itself."

While she walked along, Kanzaki almost bumped into a girl.

The girl gave a slight nod in her direction and passed by, but Kanzaki immediately spun around.

"Who is that girl? I didn't see her among the staff before."

"Oh, um..." The tour guide nodded. "That is the girl who acted as a test subject. She is the one that reported Ellasone's disappearance to us."

Part 5

The girl was around 16 or 17 years old.

Her name seemed to be Seachel.

Her blonde hair was a strong mix of gold and light brown. The blue of her veins could be seen below her white skin. She wore a red dress. She gave an overall delicate impression and she had a distinctive way of swinging her body back and forth while she walked.

Kanzaki felt she walked like a penguin.

The girl currently had her back to Kanzaki. She was leading Kanzaki outside of the house. On either side of the narrow stone path, small stores filled up every gap. Japan's ready-built houses were ridiculed by the world as being cramped, but those shops were not even half their size.

As Kanzaki thought that, Seachel spoke without turning around.

"This place is like a city of dollhouses, so I find it lovely and I quite like it."

Kanzaki looked at the girl's back again as the girl continued to speak.

"The main problem is that the parks and churches are rather far away."

Seachel stopped in a small park. The area was only 30 meters square and it had no playground equipment for children. All it had were flower beds and benches. A dirty soccer ball was lying in one corner, so it seemed the area was used to play in.

Seachel walked over to a bench and brought her slender arms back behind her. It was as if she were showing her palms to Kanzaki.

"Which do you want?"

When she said that, there were suddenly a can of coffee and a can of tea in her hands. The two cans were too big to have been hidden in Seachel's hands and her dress did not appear to have pockets.

She had not used magic.

It had merely been sleight of hand.

"I'll take the tea."

"Then hurry up and take it. I was trying to show off, but these are actually burning my hands."

Kanzaki took the can, but it did not have a normal pull tab. Like a canned good, it was made so the entire top portion opened. She found that to be odd and checked the brand name on the side, but she did not recognize it.

"It's vacuum packed from a privately owned café. They're perfect for souvenirs. The owner of the café said it was a type of heresy though."

While she spoke. Seachel popped open the can of coffee and sat on the bench. However, she had an odd way of sitting. She circled around behind it and sat down on top of the back of the bench.

"You said you wanted to ask me something."

"Yes."

"If it's about where Ellasone is, I don't know. If I did, I would chase after him myself rather than relying on you all. If I wasn't worried about him, I wouldn't have gone out of my way to contact you."

"It's about that," Kanzaki said trying to stop Seachel's words from rushing ahead too far. "I just can't grasp your relationship with the restraint craftsman. Ellasone tested the endurance of the restraints he created on you. I simply don't see how that kind of circumstance would lead to you being worried about him."

"Is that question really necessary for your investigation?"

"..."

"Or do you think I couldn't take it anymore and ended up burying him under the floorboards?"

"...I saw him and I do not think that you have the skills necessary to fake that with an illusion."

"I learned how to contact you from Ellasone. Do you really think he didn't tell me anything else about magicians?"

A cold wind blew through.

Kanzaki thought about that possibility for a bit, but finally denied it.

"If that were the case, you would have had no reason to report his disappearance."

"True," the girl smiled very, very thinly and took a sip of coffee. "Well, it doesn't really matter. It isn't something I'm trying to hide. And my relationship with Ellasone is not what you're imagining."

"What?"

"I'll leave your imaginings to you," Seachel said while swinging her feet as they hung down from the back of the bench.

Kanzaki frowned.

"How did you come to know Ellasone anyway? From what I can tell, you don't seem to be a magician. I don't see how you would get a chance to meet someone like a restraint craftsman."

"Yeah, I don't even really know," said Seachel vaguely. "It happened when I was around 10. One evening on a holiday, my parents and I went out for a picnic. I found it odd that we were going out in the evening, but I was happy to get to go out and play. I can't remember where we went, but I do know that my parents disappeared leaving me behind."

"..."

"And as if it had been arranged beforehand, some strange men approached me. When I think back on it now, it seems clear that it was a type of human trafficking. My parents must have had their reasons. Anyway, I was fortunate enough to not be sold into slavery. I was saved by Ellasone. The men doubled over and were blown away. At the time I was confused as to how I had been saved."

Seachel spoke as if she were bored.

The story must have been that fixed within her heart.

"I had no idea what was going on at the time, but he had used magic to save me. I think anyone would have been confused upon seeing what had happened."

"And then you were taken in by Ellasone?"

"No." Seachel held the coffee can in both hands. "He brought me to a child protection agency...but I just didn't like the place. That man who had left me there had left an odd impression on me. I felt that if I snuck out I might see him again. I felt he might save me again."

"..."

"So I escaped. I escaped again and again and every time the people from the agency brought me back. Eventually, word of what I was doing must have reached Ellasone. After that, when I escaped, he would often be the one to catch me. ...For me, that really had the opposite effect than what they were hoping for. I knew then that I truly could see him again if I escaped, so I did so even more."

Why had she been that insistent on trying to find Ellasone?

Kanzaki had a vague idea, but then Seachel spoke for herself.

"What humans need to live properly is a purpose in life," the girl said.

Seachel had once suddenly lost everything and now she smoothly spoke those heavy words.

"Even if you become a billionaire, make one of the great discoveries of the century, or create wonderful pieces of art, none of it matters if you have no purpose in life. ...Well, I've never done any of those things, so I'm just guessing. But I can tell. I wanted a purpose in life. I think that purpose was Ellasone."

"And that led to him testing his restraints on you?"

"Ah ha ha. That didn't come till later. I continued to escape and wander around dangerously late at night and I was eventually left in Ellasone's care. It seems he spoke with the child protection agency and got special permission. And it was all according to the plan I had come up with at such a young age. And so I was taken in by Ellasone. Well, technically I lived with the old couple in a nearby house, but I had made a definite connection to him."

Kanzaki frowned.

From what she had heard of the story, it sounded like Ellasone had saved the girl by chance and had been troubled as to how to deal with her. At the very least, it did not sound like the actions of someone who would use the girl to test his own restraints...

"It was for the same reason. It was an issue of a purpose in life. And Ellasone had realized it."

The meaning behind Seachel's words was rather unclear.

She seemed to realize that herself and started giving an additional explanation.

"Now, Ellasone tried to hide his restraints…or rather, magic. However, I already knew. I had seen him save me with a strange power. So I offered to help him. Of course, he refused me. After all, I was still 10 at the time. A normal adult does not want to show leather restraints to a child."

"So why…?"

"Like I said, Ellasone had realized it. Didn't you find it odd? I escaped the agency again and again and again and again, but the people running the place were not idiots. The first time maybe, but do you really think I could just easily escape that many times? Ellasone is a restraint specialist. In other words, he's an expert at capturing. That was why he realized what even I had not. Simply put…he realized I have a natural disposition for escaping."

"…"

"We were opposites. And he knew that I wanted a purpose in life. He also probably knew that if he refused me, I would escape again in search of a purpose in life. …What was needed to keep me safe was truly quite simple. Ellasone just had to let me help him with his job in order to give me a purpose in life."

But an amateur girl who knew nothing of the foundations of magic could not help in the construction of locks and restraints that were used in specialized facilities such as the Tower of London which imprisoned professional magicians. Having her near the magical work would put her in danger and letting her help could lower the security of the devices to be put in important facilities which could bring about greater problems down the road.

However, he could not have just rejected her. If he had, Seachel would have disappeared in search of a purpose in life. That girl had escaped the child protection agency again and again. Because he had seen that disposition in her, Ellasone could not let his guard down. He had to prevent her from becoming a victim of some crime while she disappeared into the city at night.

"Ellasone seemed to try to distance me from magic and the restraints as much as he could. He may have wanted to give me a proper purpose in life. But no matter what he did, nothing changed. I told you I was living in an old couple's house, right?"

"Yes."

"I was not being looked after by Ellasone when it came to just everyday life. But I would periodically head over to his house so I could have him use me to perform the endurance tests."

"…"

Kanzaki remained silent for a bit.

Seachel had said "so I could have him use me". She had not been forced to do it. She had volunteered to do it.

"It became a habit. It wasn't something I enjoyed doing. It was something that pained me not to do. My purpose in life has been fixed on magic and restraints. ...Heh heh. And yet I can't create either thing myself."

Kanzaki felt like she could see the suffering the restraint craftsman had gone through.

If Ellasone was the type of person Seachel said he was, then he would not have allowed himself to get a civilian wrapped up in that kind of thing for his own profit. After all, doing so would rob all meaning of having saved Seachel from being sold into slavery in the first place.

Even if doing so was giving Seachel a purpose in life, using her for endurance tests had to have pained him greatly. But at the same time, since he had chased after her time after time when she escaped from the child protection agency, he may have somehow enjoyed being thrown into that unfamiliar situation.

Until the restraint craftsman named Ellasone had disappeared without telling the girl anything.

"I don't know if he disappeared on his own or if he was taken away by someone else," Seachel said as if it had nothing to do with her.

Her blunt words made it sound like she trusted Ellasone.

It seemed as if there was something invisible connecting them and binding them together.

"If he doesn't come back soon and give me my purpose in life, this could be a problem. After all, I'm the kind of person that does not stay in one place. I have a feeling that if I decide to go off in search of him, that I'll never return to this country again."

Part 6

After her investigation and questioning were over, Kanzaki headed back to the jeans shop owner's car. She was thinking of heading back to central London, but...

"...Why are you standing in front of the car like that?"

"Look, Kanzaki. Do you see this irritating scrap of paper stuck in the wiper? I got a damn ticket."

"Can't you just make a claim with the Anglican Church?"

"You idiot. I'm not an official member like you. I'm just a jeans shop owner, so I can't make any claims with them." The shop owner stuffed the ticket in his pocket and sighed. "Really, for all your hard work, you get a salary paid from the British people's taxes and you even get a bonus when you complete a case. Meanwhile, I have orders piling up back at my shop."

"When you put it that way, I do feel a bit sorry for you, but..."

"Then give me something. How about you give me a kiss when we complete this case!!"

"If you keep that up, I'll settle for giving you a kick."

The shop owner opened the driver side door while muttering about being on the losing end of the bargain. Kanzaki started to get in the back seat, but the shop owner stopped her.

"Oh, the back seat is full of the creepy restraint collection I'm borrowing from Ellasone's place. You get in the passenger seat."

"? But what about the tour guide?"

"She left before us. She said she had to go to St. Julian's Cathedral and give a report on the status of the case. It seems the bishop there is worried about Ellasone's disappearance. Well, since magical prisons could be thrown open one after another using Ellasone's knowledge and techniques, I guess that isn't too surprising."

"I see," muttered Kanzaki as she circled around to the passenger seat.

As before, her 2 meter katana was put inside a surfboard case that was stored on top of the car.

The electric car that looked like a classic car smoothly drove off.

"How did things go with the young lady?"

"Well, at the very least it does not seem that she was abused."

"I thought not."

"You knew?"

"Yeah, somehow or other," he responded arbitrarily while turning the wheel. "If things had truly been bad, she would have at least had one scar or injury on her. And she didn't walk like someone trying to hide anything like that under her clothes. And when she talked about Ellasone, her eyes did not wander and her speech pattern did not change. People who are truly cornered do not have the attention left over to be careful about things like that."

"Did you find any hint in the house that could be used to find him?"

"If I had, the back seat would not be filled with leather products. I'm gonna have to stay up late into the night investigating the magical structures in those things."

"Yes."

"But it's also strange. If there are no hints at all, that means the investigation turned up no contacts and not even an address for his favorite restaurant or an acquaintance of his. Isn't that strange? Any house is at least going to have the phone number for the electric, water, or gas companies," the shop owner said offhand. "Sounds to me like Ellasone himself got rid of all that stuff before he ran off."

"Or some third party broke in and eliminated it all."

The shop owner suggested stopping for dinner somewhere, but their conversation was cut off by Kanzaki's cell phone ringing.

After speaking for a bit, she finally hung up.

"What is it? Is it something you can tell me about?"

"Yes. We need to take a bit of a detour."

"Why?"

"We have a report from someone who saw him. Shortly before his disappearance, Ellasone came into contact with a certain magic cabal."

Part 7

"Ehh!? And you let Kanzaki go there all on her own!?" said the tour guide girl over the phone.

The jeans shop owner had parked his car on the shoulder of the road and was eating a hamburger. As the tour guide had said, Kanzaki was not inside the car with him. She had already headed into the magic cabal's headquarters.

The shop owner placed a bottle of iced coffee in the ring-shaped cup holder.

"But she told me not to go with her."

"How can you say that!? Kanzaki is a girl! She's a sexy girl with a nice body!! How could you let her head into the hidden base of a magic cabal all on her own!?"

"Yeah, you're right. Kanzaki is sexy."

"That's not the important part!! What if she gets captured!?"

While the girl's high pitched voice hurt his ears, the jeans shop owner looked out through the windshield. The headquarters of the magic cabal Ellasone had been in contact with shortly before his disappearance was located in the remains of a soccer stadium a bit away from London. That was the fate of facilities that could not find a buyer. Most likely, modern magicians were in the locker rooms secretly calculating the locations of the stars, putting magnets on the end of red colored staffs to create fire symbolic weapons, and any number of other things.

"You do know that Kanzaki is a Saint, right?"

"She's one of the fewer than 20 people in the world who have special characteristics, right? They possess the bodily characteristics of the Christian Son of God, so a certain amount of the Son of God's power resides in them in the same way the power of the true cross resides in the crosses on churches that are made to resemble it." The tour guide seemed angry. "But it does not matter if she has that disposition or not! That does not change the fact that Kanzaki is a girl! As an English gentleman, you should do your part and escort her!!"

"Oh, I see," the shop owner replied halfheartedly. "Then do you know that Kanzaki can see a handgun bullet coming for her and dodge it?"

"...What?"

"The same with lightning." The shop owner sighed. "When you fire a handgun, the sparks of the muzzle flash fly from the barrel. The speed of light and the speed of the bullet are not the same. The bullet will always arrive after the light. Due to this, Kanzaki can move her head to the side after seeing the light from the barrel and dodge the coming bullet."

Just as he was making that perhaps exaggerated boast, about half of the soccer stadium in front of him suddenly crumbled.

The curving structure that acted as both the stands and the outer wall was flattened all at once. A thick cloud of dust flew up into the air and the clattering of the scattering building materials could be heard.

Also audible were cries of anger and fear that were likely being emitted by the magicians. There was not the slightest hint of worry on the shop owner's face. Kanzaki's surprise attack had clearly been a success.

"Saints are people who can move at the speed of sound and slice a bomber in two," he said sounding bored. "I'm not sure we should count monsters like that as humans, much less girls."

Part 8

Kanzaki, the tour guide, and the shop owner returned to the jeans shop. It was quite late. In fact, it was around midnight.

“I thought magically investigating the restraints was my job?”

“We will share what work we can,” Kanzaki smoothly replied to the shop owner. “In the end, it seems the magic cabal I attacked did not know any of the details.”

Hearing that, the tour guide looked confused.

“Huh? I thought they had been hired by someone to transport Ellasone somewhere? Doesn’t that mean he was taken by someone else…?”

“We cannot rule out the possibility that Ellasone himself hired them,” Kanzaki said as she took a bite from a rice ball for a late dinner. “Let’s put everything other than definite information aside for now. Right now, we have to see whether there is any information hidden in these restraints that a magical investigation will reveal.”

About half of the shop was the shop owner’s workshop. He used it to mend damaged products, create replicas of famous jeans of bygone years…and to carry out magical analysis work that had been requested of him.

There were about 300 of the restraints both large and small. They were colored the red and black of leather and their form varied from bodysuits that covered someone entirely to gags that plugged someone’s mouth.

On the workshop table, the shop owner spread out a large piece of paper used for patterns. He then grabbed one of the restraints randomly. It was a restraint for the legs that looked like two boots bound together. He placed it on top of the pattern paper.

“First, I need to test out whether the method of analysis I use will even work.”

“How do you analyze them?” asked the tour guide.

The shop owner placed lamps at the four corners of the table and then pulled out a knife which he lightly stabbed into the center of the pattern paper. The four lamps in the corners produced four shadows which created a black cross with the knife at the center.

Seeing that, Kanzaki asked, “You’re going with the toast?”

“It’s the quickest method.”

“Eh? Eh?”

Ignoring the tour guide who was feeling left behind, the shop owner grabbed a glass from the cupboard and poured a half empty bottle of mineral water in it.

“The toast has its roots in testing for poison. In Europe, it was a process used to prove you hadn’t put any poison in the other person’s glass. After all, if there was poison in his glass, you would end up drinking it yourself.”

The shop owner took the glass filled with mineral water and brought it in close to the handle of the knife standing on the table.

“Here, the toast is given the meaning of seeing through your opponent’s tricks. Also, the glass corresponds to the Christian Holy Grail. It was filled with the Son of God’s blood and it brought those who healed all sorts of wounds closer to the truth. If I perform a toast with that Holy Grail…”

A clear tone rang out.

The shop owner had struck the handle of the knife with the glass.

“…this happens.”

Immediately afterwards, light was emitted from the pattern paper. A bluish-white light spread from the knife to the entire pattern paper and what looked like the blueprints for something became visible. It was crammed full of writing about 5 mm tall. It was “something like” a magic circle. That restraint that bound the legs with boots that seemed sewn together simply had magical symbols that elaborate in it.

“It worked.”

“This is a good general purpose method, but it’s useless when any kind of exclusive obstruction is used. We’re lucky Ellasone didn’t know much about this field.”

The shop owner slightly spun the glass around and, as if in response, the blue-colored blueprint quickly highlighted the especially important text and diagrams in red.

“I see. This really is a special made item. He’s forced security into this thing on the level of what would be used in a cathedral door. This is well beyond what you would use to restrain a person. You could probably do the job of an entire dam with these boots.”

“Ellasone had specially prepared these restraints despite there being no orders for them, right? I hope a hint to his disappearance can be found in them.”

“We have to analyze all of those before we can determine that,” the shop owner said as he pointed to the countless restraints both large and small piled up on the floor. “Now then, did you manage to learn the spell I used? In that case, get to work. If we split up the work, we might be able to finish by morning.”

“Eh? Eh?” said the tour guide girl who seemed to be rather flustered. “Learned it…? You’re saying I’m supposed to try that myself after seeing it once!?”

“What else do you need?” said the shop owner frowning curiously. “Magic is just knowledge and technique. Other than special examples like our Saint over here, it’s something that anyone can do as long as they know how. …Why do you think I revealed what I was doing and didn’t use any dummy actions or conceal any of my actions? It’s a pain in the ass to give lectures on each individual thing, so I just showed it all to you quickly.”

The tour guide’s mouth flapped opened and closed silently, but Kanzaki already had a knife and a glass in her hand. The tour guide decided it was no use. Kanzaki Kaori’s specs were simply so much greater that the tour guide girl could not hope for the other girl to feel the same way.

“…Dammit. People who can do these things act like it’s so easy.”

“Think of it like the multiplication table. Then you can do it.”

“…Once again, that’s the kind of thing people who can do it say.”

Part 9

The tour guide girl puffed out her cheeks and lost all energy to continue.

A few hours had passed and the workshop was filled with a sluggish atmosphere.

The term “magic work” may have sounded mysterious, but it was basically just careful work with ones hands. With no end in sight and no results of any kind, the hours of work became unbearable.

Analyzing around 300 restraints before dawn was simply too much work.

They would not finish in just one night.

The tour guide had realized that after actually working a bit and she lost all focus as soon as she did.

Kanzaki was continuing the analysis work like a machine with as serious an expression as ever, but the jeans shop owner was clearly in an unmotivated mood just like the tour guide girl.

The shop owner then admitted defeat.

“Ahh, dammit!! We can’t do this with just 3 people!!”

He was giving up for a stupid reason, but that could be taken as proof that magicians were human, too. In fact, Kanzaki was actually scary in how she managed to seriously continue her work with uniform focus from the beginning to then.

“All we know is that each of these restraints is incredibly strong and provides security on the level of a cathedral!! We haven’t found a single piece of information that gives us a clue to Ellasone’s whereabouts and we have no idea what he was planning on restraining with these!!”

“We do know why he put these restraints aside and did not test them on that girl, though.”

“Yes, these restraints rival a dam in strength. Restraining a human in one would crush them under the pressure. He wasn’t planning on restraining an angel or something, was he?”

“These aren’t strong enough for that.”

“It scares me how readily you were able to say that. …Kanzaki, by any chance, have you fought an angel?”

“I wouldn’t say it was a complete one, but I technically can’t answer no,” she said nonchalantly.

The shop owner and the tour guide fell silent.

It was difficult to tell whether she was joking or not.

“Anyway, everything here is cathedral this and cathedral that!! Everything from those handcuffs and these shackles! I guess I should have expected this from someone who worked on the security of the Tower of London. All of his techniques are so unnecessarily wonderful it makes my head spin! I wish he would think about the people who have to analyze this stuff!!”

"…"

Hearing the shop owner's rant, Kanzaki's hands suddenly froze in place.

She looked back at the analysis diagrams then carefully lined up a few of the restraints.

"I can't believe this…"

"Ahn? What is it, Kanzaki?"

"These restraints were not created to be used as part of a cathedral."

After lining up the restraints, Kanzaki performed the analysis toast once more.

The diagrams that appeared did not overlap each other.

As if they were pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, they fit together to an unnatural degree.

"It is the opposite. By combining the security of these restraints, he was creating blueprints identical to an existing cathedral! It is the same as acquiring a map of the layout of a mansion one is about to steal something from!!"

"Hey, wait a second. So you're saying Ellasone disappeared in order to…"

"In order to attack an Anglican cathedral. He carefully inspected the cathedral under the pretense of delivering restraints, carried out the necessary preparations, and then disappeared once those were complete. He has created an elaborate miniature version with these restraints and has fully analyzed the security. He most likely knows every weakness. He would not have disappeared if he did not think he had a chance of success."

"S-so where exactly is the cathedral he's going to attack!?" asked the tour guide bracing herself, but Kanzaki stared directly at her.

"It is the place you went to."

"Eh?"

"St. Julian's Cathedral in London. …If I recall, the bishop there was oddly worried about Ellasone's disappearance and asked that you give a report."

"Hey, Kanzaki. You don't mean…"

"Yes, it seems those two have some kind of connection."

Part 10

The two warrior priests guarding the main entrance to St. Julian's Cathedral did not let their focus waver. It may have been 3 in the morning, but proper security was more focused at that time than normal.

That was why they quickly noticed the change.

First, they noticed the man wielding a giant axe that was over 2 meters long. Next, they noticed that the axe held the role of a spiritual item, a tool used in magical spells.

The latter observation clinched it. It pushed them past simply acting as guards. In other words, they decided they had to kill the man before he attacked them.

But…

The man, Ellasone, paid no heed to that.

He merely approached straight on and swung down the giant axe.

A heavy sound rang out.

One of the warrior priests thought he was dead, but he was surprised to find that he had not been sliced in two. It was quite the opposite. Despite the axe's trajectory being one that would have severed his right shoulder and right leg in one blow, it strangely slipped right through him. …And rings made of a silver metal appeared along the areas it had passed through. His arm and leg. The metal rings that had appeared in those two places pulled toward each other like they were powerful magnets. As a result, the warrior priest's body was bent unnaturally causing him to fall to the ground.

He finally cried out and the other warrior priest tried to bring his staff out at the ready.

But before he could, Ellasone wordlessly swung the giant axe horizontally. Metal rings bound the priest on both arms and his waist causing him to fall to the ground as well.

"Sorry I'm so late," Ellasone said in a low voice as he looked up above as if he had just remembered something.

Just above the gate was a small statue that would report any intruders.

"You know why I'm going to kill you, right?"

♦

Kanzaki Kaori charged out of the jeans shop and jumped straight up about 20 meters. She then started leaping from building to building. Getting to St. Julian's Cathedral that way was faster than taking a car.

She could hear the tour guide's voice coming from her cell phone.

"It seems something has happened at St. Julian's Cathedral and the Anglican Church has been notified. Reinforcements should be there soon, but…"

"But Ellasone will likely have achieved his objective by then."

She could already see the roof of the cathedral.

Kanzaki held her 2 meter sword and gritted her teeth as she leaped through the nighttime city.

The restraint craftsman Ellasone had once saved a normal girl's life in more ways than one even if it had not entirely been his intention. But a certain truth became clear by the fact that he had disappeared of his own free will in order to attack St. Julian's Cathedral.

(…In the end, was the salvation you gave that girl nothing more than that?)

Something bitter grew within her heart.

The fact that the girl was waiting for Ellasone was just too ridiculous given what was happening.

(Was it nothing more than something you gave up on partway through in order to carry out your own objective?)

"Hey," said the jeans shop owner. "Don't you find it odd? Even if it was an irregular incident for him, Ellasone still saved that kid. It just doesn't seem like something someone who would be attacking a cathedral would do."

"What if saving her was just something he did on a whim?"

It made her sick to say it, but she still denied the shop owner.

"You're saying the bastard who prepared all those restraints and carefully analyzed the magical security of his target cathedral did that 'on a whim'? If his attack plan was truly this important, he wouldn't have saved that girl. It's thanks to that that we were able to guess at his plan to attack the cathedral. If he knew it would get in the way of his plan to begin with, he wouldn't have gotten involved."

"…? Then what is Ellasone thinking? He's abandoning the girl right now in order to attack St. Julian's Cathedral."

"What I'm saying is," the shop owner carefully chose his words. "What if there is a connection between him saving that girl and his attack on the cathedral?"

♦

Ellasone walked slowly through St. Julian's Cathedral.

There was no illumination within the building and the faint light leaking in from outside allowed only silhouettes to be seen. The cathedral would normally have been wrapped in comfortable stillness like cold glass, but it had become a noisy battlefield filled with angry cries.

But there was no one who could stop him.

He had spent years making all the preparations necessary for the realization of his plan. Supplying Necessarius with anti-magician restraints and entering St. Julian's Cathedral to deliver them had all been a part of those preparations.

He already knew how many guards there were and how they were equipped.

He knew the number, type, and layout of all the magical security items.

And…

He had the ability needed to defeat them.

It was because he had thought everything through that Ellasone was able to say that no one could stop him.

The cathedral had over 500 magical devices and equipment used to stop intruders. They were supposed to cover each other's weaknesses constructing a system with no blind spots.

However…

Ellasone knew the system so perfectly that he was able to use those devices and equipment against them.

If he was just taking over the system, those in the cathedral would not have been having so much trouble. Basically, they would just have to avoid the traps they had set up themselves.

But Ellasone had disassembled the system set up in St. Julian's Cathedral and had set up new traps. To those protecting the cathedral, they were unknown traps in unknown locations, so they had no way to avoid them. Their assumptions of where the traps should be were making them suffer even further.

"…"

Ellasone glanced around and all the doors locked tightly.

The passageways stretched on infinitely, the stairways looped eternally, and all of Ellasone's enemies were utterly trapped.

Amid all the confusion, only Ellasone was headed accurately for his destination.

It was all going according to plan.

No irregular problems had occurred in the process of switching over from theory to reality. That was the result of his endlessly repeated simulations of breaking in using the miniature version of the magical security of the cathedral using the combination of those restraints.

Suddenly, all of the candles around him lit up.

The flames vibrated unnaturally and a vibration in the air created a voice.

It was the voice of the cardinal who waited in the deepest part of the cathedral.

"Are you here to kill me?"

"What else would I be here for?"

A young security guard stood before Ellasone. He had not breached the altered security. Instead, he had just happened to not be caught by it. Ellasone swung his giant axe and bound the man before continuing to speak.

"I'm sure you knew."

"So it's about that." There was a slight hesitation in the cardinal's voice. "But you received the benefits of that as well."

"Yes, that's true," said Ellasone very, very quietly as he walked very, very slowly. "To be honest, I just couldn't help but enjoy it way, way too much. That is why I was unable to forgive myself."

♦

Kanzaki broke into St. Julian's Cathedral.

The cathedral's door had been solid, but she had forced it open with the strength of a Saint. Kanzaki hurried inside without giving even a glance to the remnants of the gate that had collapsed inside.

"We do not have time to verify anything, so we have no proof, but there are many suspicions regarding him."

Kanzaki frowned at those words from the tour guide.

"You are saying this cathedral's bishop did something?"

"How do you think he rose to such a high position?" the tour guide replied to Kanzaki's question. "The Anglican Church has the special anti-magician unit of Necessarius. It seems that bishop was rewarded for supplying a large number of personnel for Necessarius."

"How is that suspicious?"

"…What if about 50% of the people he supplied had lost their parents in accidents or other incidents? And what if another 30% had been abandoned due to their parents being in debt?"

"You don't mean…"

"As I said, these are nothing more than suspicions. There are no connections between each individual incident, but that bishop simply finds children like that too often. It is possible that he carries out some kind of 'preliminary arrangements' in order to gain personnel…"

Kanzaki was reminded of the circumstances surrounding that girl.

And she was reminded of Ellasone who she had become unnaturally attached to.

Was it possible that…?

"Ellasone may have known about some kind of trickery that we still do not know of," continued the tour guide girl.

"That's why…"

Kanzaki trailed off because she had noticed something moving within the dim cathedral.

Kanzaki stopped moving.

They did not move along the floor like normal.

They moved along the walls and ceiling.

Something like giant snakes glowing silver wriggled along. The metal snakes were over 15 cm thick and over 5 meters long. There were easily over 30 of the autonomous interception spiritual items and they were mercilessly crushing even the marble pillars after wrapping around them.

Their details were similar to the Mancatcher stag beetle Kanzaki had run into at the bus terminal.

“Gleipnir,” she muttered upon seeing the metal snakes.

With a single glance, Kanzaki determined what magic was being used.

It was a mysterious string from Norse mythology. It was a tool used to bind Fenrir, the beast that would devour Odin. It was normally easily bendable and easily stretchable, but once something was bound by it, it was said that not even the strongest power could break it.

“It is made of the footsteps of a cat, the roots of a mountain, the beard of a woman, the spit of a bird, the tendons of a bear, and the breath of a fish. However, each of those has no real meaning. It is a metaphor saying that it is made of materials that do not exist in this world,” said Kanzaki as if reciting something as she reached for the handle of her sword.

“Is it that much of a legendary item?”

“No. Basically, it was created from a material that they did not have the techniques to make at the time. Ellasone seems to have guessed that it was steel that has undergone complicated heat treatments.”

Other than the metal snakes, there were also giant octopuses and bats. It seemed the important part was for them to be made of magically manufactured steel and so Ellasone was not picky about what shape he made them.

Kanzaki sighed and actually grabbed the handle of her sword.

“C-can you slice through them?”

“If it was something that cannot be broken, then that chief god would not end up being devoured.”

Part 11

The door opened silently.

The action was similar to that of a driver opening the back door of a high class black car for a rich girl, but the person who entered was clearly an attacker.

It was the restraint craftsman Ellasone.

Upon seeing his face, the old bishop started to stand up from the large chair behind a work desk. But Ellasone did not let him. With a slight movement of his index finger, he manipulated a charm made of pale white cowhide. Thin wires shot through the air and bound the bishop's arms to the armrests of the chair.

"I would like to make you suffer as long as possible, but it looks like someone would get in my way if I don't finish this quickly."

"…Do you really think that bringing me pain will resolve all of this?"

"No. There is something I want to ask you first."

"Wha—?"

The bishop started speaking, but his mouth was suddenly blocked. A new cowhide charm had transformed into a restraint. The instant Ellasone flicked his finger, something like a racehorse's bit filled the bishop's mouth.

"It's quite simple. I want a clear answer as to whether you were buying and selling those children."

"That project was not my idea. The entirety of the Anglican Church wa—gh!?"

An odd noise cut off the bishop's words.

The bit that was as soft as a sponge had suddenly become as hard as steel and expanded as if trying to scrape out the bishop's teeth. Ellasone spoke quietly to the bishop who could barely breathe much less speak.

"This is an item used for witch trials. It is a gag that only allows the wearer to speak the truth. …By the way, it grows in size each time you lie. Just like the fairy tale puppet's growing nose. If you get too carried away, you could end up breaking your own jaw before long."

"Gh…gh…"

The bishop's jaw was already stretched to its limit. If it grew even 5 mm more, his jaw would likely dislocate. And Ellasone would likely not care even if the man's jaw did dislocate. If necessary, he could just give the bishop something to write with.

"Gh…gah….agh…"

"What? Is that not enough? Then I can use the gloves that constrict your fingers, the boots that apply pressure to your shin bones, the gear breastplate that bends your back, or…well, I have plenty of others. All of them have my guarantee of quality. You can enjoy them as much as you like."

With the sound of grinding metal, the bishop lost freedom of his body bit by bit. Ellasone's expression did not change even slightly as he spoke calmly to the bishop.

"Let me ask you again. How much did you have to do with the buying and selling of those children?"

"Th-that was my private project and it was not completed to a level where it could actually be practically used…"

That must have been the truth because the bit became soft like a sponge and allowed the bishop to speak. The restraints on his arms, legs, and back stopped causing him pain.

"Necessarius is an elite unit of those with true ability, but that makes it difficult to obtain the needed amount of personnel. Also, the contents of the missions can cause members to be lost. …As a result, a rapid change in the numbers in the unit could cause a major change to the unit's overall ability to fight."

"So you prepared a system to obtain the needed amount of personnel when it was necessary? …You set up children from civilian backgrounds to be magicians knowing full well that most of them would not survive."

"As long as the main force's quality and numbers were increasing while the children died, that was all that mattered."

The restraints did not stop the bishop from speaking.

Most likely, that was the truth. Ellasone frowned.

Without noticing that frown, the bishop continued.

"There were various methods, but all of the children taken in by the Anglican Church had one condition in common. In other words, they had either lost or been abandoned by their parents and had lost anyone to believe in. They naturally desired a purpose in life, so when magic was suggested as a possible answer, they would head in that direction on their own. …You merely came into contact with one of those children. Well, in the end, you presented the option of magic to that girl…Seachel, was it?"

"…"

"It was enjoyable, wasn't it?" It looked like the bishop attempted to twist up the edges of his restrained lips. "Making sure it felt that way was my job. Being seen as a hero by a child gave you pleasure. You enjoyed it and enjoyed it and enjoyed it and enjoyed it while receiving the negative benefits of it…and now you're coming to judge me? We're the same. You would not have acted as you have otherwise. You were just that hooked on my services."

"…Yes."

Ellasone did not deny it.

He then poured strength into his hands holding the giant axe that was over 2 meters long.

"Didn't I tell you? I enjoyed it way, way, way too much. And that is why I cannot forgive myself."

An odd sound rang out.

All at once, something like a thin wire bound the bishop from the top of his chest to the bottom of his waist. It was not something to merely keep a human from moving. With tremendous power, it was digging deeply into the flesh of the bishop as if to crush the basic shape of his body.

In an instant, a few bones broke, blood vessels burst, and tears ran through internal organs.

The bishop's mouth flapped open and closed and something red mixed in with the foam inside, but Ellasone's expression did not change even slightly.

And then…

"Ellasone!!" yelled a female voice and the door was thrown open.

Rolling in through the door were the giant snakes Ellasone had left to slow any pursuers down. Their heads were cleanly severed.

Ellasone looked up just in time to see a girl with a ponytail step inside the room.

It was Kanzaki Kaori.

"I have a general understanding of the situation. Necessarius does not wish to acquire personnel in that way and we never authorized its use. The bishop will eventually be properly judged. There is no reason for you to continue doing this!"

“I see,” he muttered, but then he shook his head. “But that is not enough.”

“Are you saying you will not be satisfied unless you kill him with your own hands?”

“No. It’s true that this will be more or less resolved if I hand this bishop over to you. But that would still leave someone who would not be judged.”

Kanzaki frowned at Ellasone’s words.

At first, she thought there must have been someone besides the bishop who was truly behind it, but she realized she was wrong shortly thereafter.

She realized this because Ellasone pointed at his own chest with his thumb.

“Even if that bishop is taken down, that still leaves me.”

“You don’t mean…”

“You said you had a ‘general’ understanding of the situation,” Ellasone said quietly. “Then do you know this? The restraint craftsman Ellasone did not learn of the bishop’s project after ignorantly taking in that child. He knew of the project to begin with and he knew of the circumstances surrounding the child, but he still took her in.”

“…”

“I intended to kill this bishop from the beginning. I believed that the people who received the negative benefits of his project were rotten to the core. But when I actually got involved, I realized that I was one of those rotten people.”

“Dammit,” Kanzaki cursed and gritted her teeth.

Ellasone had likely truly intended to save that girl.

When he had managed to save the scared child from the human traffickers, he had likely been truly relieved. When Seachel had escaped from the child protection agency again and again and he had found her in the city at night, he had probably been overcome with relief. As he had attempted to distance the girl from the world of magic and restraints and had been troubled by the fact that she had continued to chase after him, he had likely been glad somewhere in his heart.

And…

He had known from the beginning that all of that was going just as the black-hearted bishop had planned for it to.

He had known and he had tried to stop it, but he had been unable to change anything.

That was why he had come to truly put an end to those negative benefits.

He had come to free Seachel's life from the curse known as Ellasone.

He had finally taken action.

"Funny, isn't it?" Ellasone said. "This bishop was the one that made all of the preliminary arrangements, but I was the one that gave her the final push. It had already been inputted into that girl…into Seachel. The script saying that I would protect her no matter what had been completely inputted within her. After that, she would follow that purpose in life and chase after me no matter where I went. No matter where I flee on this planet, she would follow me until I died."

In other words, Ellasone planned on completely saving Seachel with his own death.

Kanzaki thought for a bit and then gave up trying to find material to deny him with.

She had an idea what had happened.

Ellasone had been determined to fight that bishop from the beginning. Afterwards, he had come into contact with Seachel and had known just how twisted it was. That man had struggled to delete the "purpose in life" that had been inputted in the girl for dark reasons. If he could not do so, he would just be playing right into the bishop's hands.

But…

"It may be true that your relationship with Seachel was twisted in some way. Every human has a full range of emotions and things they like and dislike, but when Seachel spoke of you, she was oddly lacking in those things. It was like someone from a cheap drama or movie."

"…"

"But if you truly want to correct that and if you truly want to bring back Seachel's humanity including the dirty or unsightly parts, then you cannot simply run away here!! No matter how difficult a situation this is, you should not be doing anything that would make Seachel cry!!"

Ellasone fell silent.

While gazing at the movements of his fingertips, Kanzaki truly felt that she did not want to cross blades with that man.

Finally Ellasone spoke.

“Even if those tears were inputted by a third party?”

“In that case, you need to make those tears real.”

For an instant, just an instant, the strength left Ellasone’s grip on his giant axe.

Immediately afterwards, a tremendous noise rang out. The thin wires binding the bishop’s body dug in even further. They reached the bone and the man’s eyes rolled around in his head. The whites of his eyes became died red and red tears flowed from his eyelids.

“Ellasone!!”

“If you do not kill me here, the source here will soon be killed.”

As he spoke, Ellasone slowly held his giant axe up in both hands. It was the medium for the spiritual item Gleipnir. If he swung it down, Kanzaki’s body would immediately be bound by the most suitable restraints for those parts of the body. Depending on the situation, it could be with such force that her flesh and joints were torn apart.

But…

That was not enough. Kanzaki swung her head to the side just slightly. She was one of the fewer than 20 Saints in the world. No matter how strong and detailed a spiritual item he held and no matter how complex a spell he put together, it would not work on her. She could see a fired bullet and then evade it, so she could not be stopped by handcuffs or shackles.

In a battle of chasing or fleeing, he might be able to manage, but in a battle of defeat or be defeated, Ellasone could not defeat Kanzaki Kaori no matter what.

It was possible that Ellasone had realized that fact.

That may have been why his expression did not change even as he saw the grave expression on Kanzaki’s face.

“My disappearance, got rid of all the problems. I doubt Seachel’s life changed much.”

“True,” Kanzaki admitted. “But it is not an issue of efficiency. No matter what you or those around her try to say, that girl is still waiting for the man known as Ellasone.”

“…”

The sound of creaking metal came from Ellasone's hands.

He followed his own conviction and did not stop to the end.

Two shadows crossed and a single roar exploded out.

The result of that battle is not something that needs to be explained.

Part 12

When Kanzaki left through the broken main entrance, the jeans shop owner was waiting in a car for her. The tour guide girl was in the passenger seat, so Kanzaki circled around to the back seat.

"How about you get a license?"

"…When I think about the fact that I can run faster, I lose all motivation to actually try."

They must have bought a late night snack because the smell of oily foods like hamburgers and fries hung in the car. The tour guide girl was even then tossing a chicken nugget in her mouth.

As she licked ketchup from her fingers, the tour guide spoke a bit anxiously.

"What is going to happen to Ellasone now?"

"I don't know. No matter how you try to smooth this over, he still attacked St. Julian's cathedral, defeated all of the guards, and bared his fangs against the bishop in charge. Normally, I would think there would be no way of avoiding an Anglican trial."

As he spoke, the shop owner looked back at Kanzaki through the rearview mirror.

His expression looked somehow cheerful.

Kanzaki realized he was reading her actions and averted her gaze before speaking.

"It is true he cannot avoid that, but if I write a report saying he performed an undercover investigation of the bishop's illicit means of acquiring personnel, his situation might end up not being so bad after all."

The tour guide girl's face lit up at that, but Kanzaki's face retained a bit of weariness.

"What is salvation?" she muttered while looking out the window.

“Why would I know? We aren’t the ones that can know that. Seachel is the only one that can determine whether she was truly saved or not,” the shop owner responded to that troublesome question while adding in a sigh or two.

He operated the steering wheel as he continued.

“There are only two things we can know. We know that shitty means of gathering personnel by manipulating the misfortune of children will no longer be used and we know that Seachel will smile once more if Ellasone returns.”

Suddenly, the tour guide’s cell phone rang.

She frantically wiped her slender fingers on a napkin and pulled out her phone.

After exchanging only a few words, she covered the phone with her hand and looked over at Kanzaki.

“It seems we have our next orders from Necessarius.”

“You heard the lady,” the jeans shop owner said while moving his fingers across the car’s steering wheel. “We may not know what salvation is, but it looks like someone else is asking us for it.”

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第②巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第二話

南国を卒業するのはいつの日か

YMIR's_ocean.

CHAPTER 2

When Will We Outgrow Tropical Countries?

YMIR's_ocean.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

We have received information that a magic cabal has invaded a solitary island in Micronesia and is preparing a spiritual item that will cause large scale destruction. Head to that island, destroy the spiritual item, stop their plan, and subdue the leader.

If you capture the leader alive, you will receive additional compensation.

However, there is no absolute need for the leader to survive. Resolve the incident in the most suitable way given the situation. The bare minimum requirements are to completely destroy the spiritual item being prepared and to completely remove anyone from the island who has the skills to repair the destroyed spiritual item.

♦

"And so we've come to the Pacific Ocean," muttered the jeans shop owner as if in greeting to the scenery.

They had just finished checking in to the small hotel adjacent to the airport.

Next to him, Kanzaki sighed heavily which did not match the tropical sunlight in the slightest.

"This is a job, so don't look so displeased," she said.

"If it's a job then pay me. How is it right to send me into a battle fierce enough to require a Saint and yet not pay me!?" The shop owner shook his head and pulled out his waterproof mobile device. "How many times do I have to tell you? I sell jeans for a living. While we're doing this, the work is piling up at my shop in London!! Look at this email. Saten-chan, the middle school girl, is sending all sorts of complaints about her jeans not being sent out. She's no longer holding back on using emoticons either!!"

It seemed he could manage the order data on his mobile device, but he had to be in London to package and ship the jeans. However, that was the shop owner's problem. It may sound cold, but as a magician, it was none of Kanzaki's concern.

She looked over at the airport that was a bit away.

It was an international airport, but it was not a huge facility with countless asphalt runways cutting across complexly and with everything from a large shopping mall to hotels within it.

It had a single runway.

And it was not paved. It was covered only in the white sand characteristic of beaches.

The tallest building was the control tower, but there was not even 10 meters to the top of the antenna.

The lobby only had the bare minimum of an inspection area for those entering the country and devices for inspecting luggage. In fact, the airport put most of its efforts into shipping cargo rather than carrying passengers.

The adjacent hotel was of a similar grade to the airport.

But then, any tourists who were going out of their way to visit that island would probably rather stay in a place that was distanced from being "new" or "comfortable".

The blue ocean.

The white sand.

"I hate you people from Necessarius because you get your travel expenses and salary paid from British taxes. And you even get a chance at a bonus here. …I can't help but be jealous since I'm being dragged around everywhere *and* I have to pay for my own plane tickets."

It was the kind of tropical island that made it seem like a crime to put any manmade objects on it. Even so, the culture there had developed to the point of having transportation routes to even smaller islands using boats and the like. Apparently, there were even villages on those islands where the system of money was meaningless.

"Don't you think it was going too far to borrow an Academy City supersonic passenger plane?" asked Kanzaki Kaori.

But the shop owner did not think too deeply about it.

“If they’re willing to let us use it, I don’t see any reason to turn them down. And it would’ve taken half a day to get here on a normal plane. This situation is urgent, right? Well, only Academy City’s planes can fly at 7000 kph.”

“Well, yes, but…”

“And we would’ve been in trouble without a charter plane and use of a special gate. Your ridiculously huge sword would normally get you caught at the airport gate.”

“Uuh…” Kanzaki flinched.

She used a katana called Shichiten Shichitou that was over 2 meters long as a weapon. Both its sharp edge and magical value were truly top class, but its size made it difficult to carry around.

She may have been a bit unwilling to admit defeat because Kanzaki pouted her lips and spoke.

“Anyway, even if we are on a tropical island, aren’t you just a little too cheerful? You’ve opened 2 bottles of champagne since we checked in.”

“What are you, stupid? Or are you just flustered because I just hit you where it hurts?”

The shop owner made no attempt to hide the fact that his face was slightly flushed due to the alcohol.

“I’m getting drunk on purpose. This is Micronesia. We’re right smack in the middle of the Pacific Ocean a bit above Australia. And this island isn’t like Hawaii or Guam where a lot of white people live. In order to blend in, I have to look like a rich but easily fooled tourist. As an Asian, you stand out here, too. What would an Amakusa do in a situation like this? As one of the descendants of the Kakure Kirishitan, you should be more knowledgeable in how to hide yourself than me.”

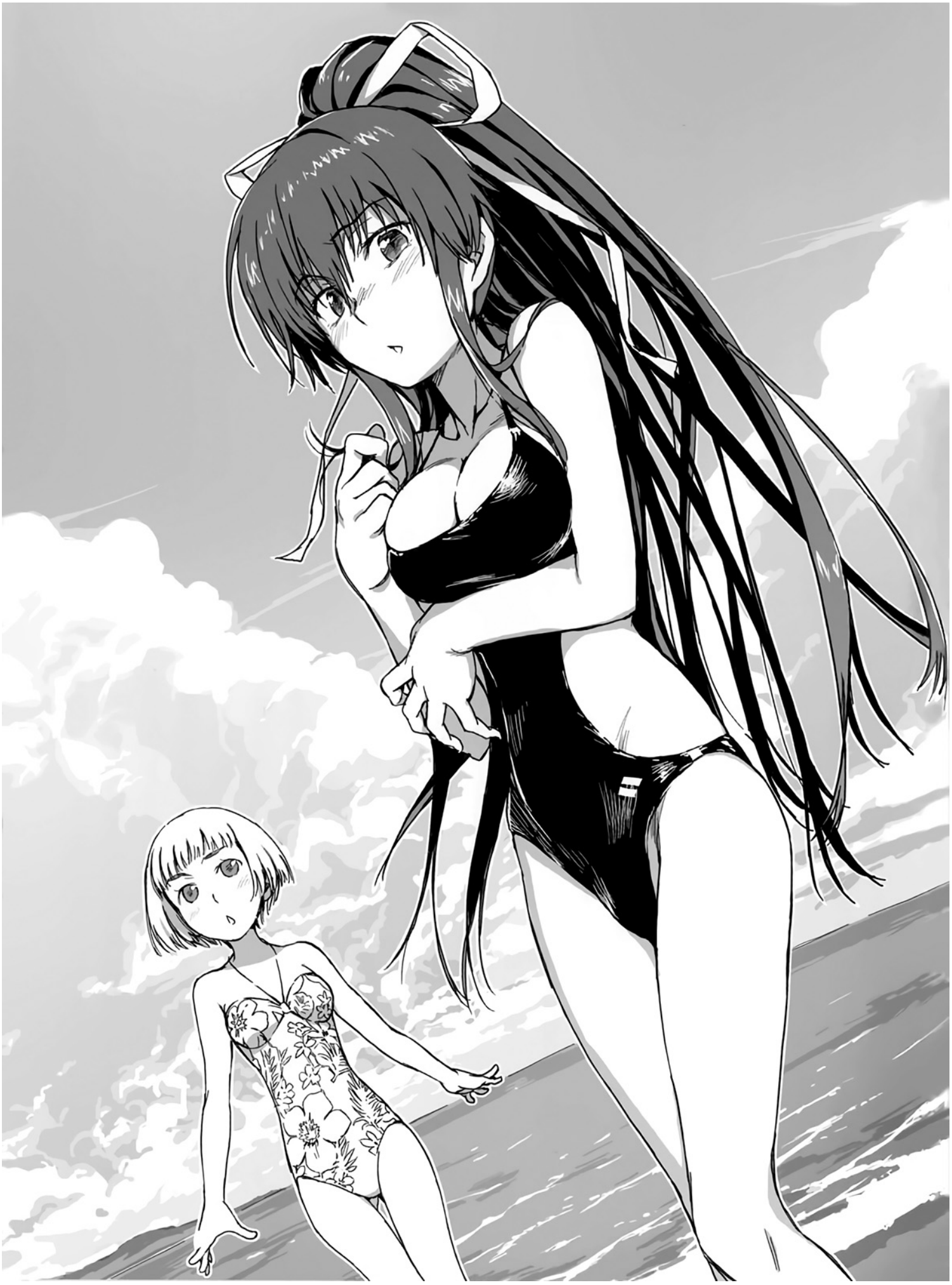
“Kh…”

Not only had she gotten flustered and dug herself even deeper into the ground, but now she was having her specialty field attacked, so Kanzaki was doubly and triply humiliated.

As she no longer had the leeway left to worry about her official position or plans and she was completely unwilling to admit defeat, Kanzaki sent one of her primary complaints at the shop owner.

“But is it really necessary for me to wear a swimsuit?”

Kanzaki twisted her body slightly in an attempt to escape the shop owner’s gaze, but the jeans shop owner showed no sign of caring.



“Why would a tourist come to this island other than for water sports? If you don’t like it, you can always wrap a towel around your head and say you’re the captain of a tuna boat. In that case, you would need to pour strength into your Saintly muscles and keep your arms and legs flexed at all times so you look like someone from a gekiga.”

“What…!? So I’m damned if I do and damned if I don’t!?”

“See? I don’t want to turn you into such a mismatched girl who only appeals to a weird niche. Really, due to everything that happened, there just wasn’t time for proper preparations. How were you planning to deal with this if I hadn’t prepared a change of clothes to help you blend in?”

“…Well, I can’t exactly say I’m satisfied with what you chose,” Kanzaki complained while pulling at various parts of her swimsuit with her fingertips.

She was wearing a mostly blue one piece swimsuit. However, that was only if you looked at it head on. There was almost no material on the back. It only had bikini-like strings fastening the important parts to ensure the swimsuit did not fall off. Overall, it was like an escalated version of a racing swimsuit with an open back. In other words, it was sexy.

The 2 meter long Japanese sword was camouflaged inside a waterski case along with the skis themselves. The skis were quite large. Combined with Kanzaki’s calm expression, they gave the impression that she was quite skilled. In fact, her atmosphere made it seem more unnatural for her to be holding something intended for a beginner.

“What is this swimsuit?”

“It’s called a monokini. It’s a variety of bikini. They’re fairly rare, but you can’t properly blend in as a tourist unless you have something that isn’t too plain and doesn’t stand out too much.”

“…I have a feeling there is a subjective reason for this beyond functionality and logic.”

“Ha ha ha. Isn’t it exciting how much like a naked apron it is?”

“Curse you!! So the primary reason was your tastes!!”

Kanzaki reached inside the waterski case and was about to pull her sword from its scabbard. The shop owner started to reach up in preparation to catch the blade in his hands, but then he realized that wouldn’t help if the blade came from the side.

That was when the tour guide came walking over in a pink one piece swimsuit and beach sandals.

“C’mon, we have to go asking around, so don’t make any suspicious actions. Once a rumor starts spreading on a small island like this, the residents’ suspicions will keep them from telling us anything.”

“…”

Kanzaki was not really listening to the girl. Instead, she was focusing on the swimsuit she was wearing.

After a few seconds, she turned hate-filled eyes in the shop owner’s direction.

“So you can prepare normal swimsuits!!”

“You fool!! You’re the sexy onee-san type!! How could I put a cute and frilly one piece like that on your plump body that’s large in all the right places!? That kind of thing is only seen when you make a hot housewife wear buruma in a punishment ga—bghah!?”

There were so many different things that had pissed Kanzaki off in that statement that she had knocked the jeans shop owner away harder than usual.

A Saint was someone who had bodily characteristics similar to the Son of God and could therefore use a portion of his power, but if the Son of God knew that power was being used for something like that, he may have cried out in sorrow.

Part 2

Uphill Island.

That was the name of the island that Kanzaki and the others had come to and the island where the magicians they were after were likely operating in secret.

The tour guide girl flipped through her small notepad.

“The island is about 17 kilometers around and it is only about 2 kilometers across south to north. It seems it was originally just a rock about 3 meters across, but a submarine volcano erupted nearby 50 years ago which caused the earth’s crust to swell up rapidly.”

“Is its name in English rather than in the local language because it is a relatively new island that was originally recorded by European geologists?”

“Incidentally, the surrounding islands do not hold good feelings for this one,” said the tour guide girl as she fidgeted with the edge of a page of the notepad. “This island was created in a short period of time by a rapid change in the earth’s crust. As it was born in an irregular way, it seems to give them an ominous and creepy impression. The airport is on this island because the surrounding islands did not wish to destroy their own nature but they still wished to receive the benefits of airplanes. In the same way, they have shoved all the bothersome things onto Uphill Island.”

“Now that’s an environment that’ll be harsh on outsiders. And the background behind people moving from the surrounding islands to such an ominous place sounds complex.” A cynical smile appeared on the shop owner’s face. “They may put on a smile for tourists, but we may run into trouble if we get too involved.”

“…So this vague ominous and creepy impression has become the core of discord among the surrounding islands. What is the religious situation like here? Or are they the type that are secular but are vaguely afraid of spirit photography?”

“It seems all of the islands in this area originally had an indigenous religion in common. It was a polytheistic religion that believed in the blessings of the ocean. But now a fair bit of Christian culture has been mixed in likely due to the effects of the Age of Exploration. Pieces of art showing a mixture between the oar of their sea god and the cross have been seen.” The tour guide girl sighed there. “However, some kind of sudden change occurred in Uphill Island’s culture. A teaching that those on this island are good and those outside of the island are evil is spreading and no equivalent teaching has been seen on the surrounding islands.”

“This island suddenly rose to the surface 50 years ago. They have likely received discriminatory treatment from the foundation of the village to the present. Is it related to that?”

The tour guide looked around and then nodded slightly in response to Kanzaki’s question.

She knew that was a topic that was best not to let the people of the island hear them discussing.

“Most of the island’s residents are very wary due to the discriminatory treatment they have received. To put it bluntly, I am not sure outsiders like us can actually get any information from them. It seems we would need to live here for over a decade to get them to open up to us.”

She was right, but Kanzaki and the shop owner did not particularly care.

“There are ways of dealing with situations like that.”

“Getting people to open up to you isn’t the only way to get information out of them.”

“?”

Part 3

There was a magician on Uphill Island.

Apparently, that magician was creating a large scale temple or ceremonial grounds in order to carry out some piece of exceedingly dangerous magic.

The magic must have been quite bad indeed for Necessarius to send out Kanzaki Kaori, one of the fewer than 20 Saints in the world.

For example, it could easily be enough to destroy a town or village in a single strike.

If it was not of that level, Kanzaki would not have been sent out. Her strategic cost was set at that level from the beginning.

There were two things she had to do.

She had to find the magician himself or whatever it was he was preparing.

And she had to utterly destroy one or both of them.

♦

The three of them split up and regrouped after about 7 hours.

The scenery was surrounded in the orange of evening.

They were still in their swimsuits and were gathered in a tourist oriented barbecue space prepared on the white beach. It was made so it could be rented for certain periods of time. It stank of the kind of place that the local people did not use but plenty of tourists looking to have some fun gathered at.

The tour guide girl looked down at something roasting on a metal skewer.

“…Are pineapples something you cook before eating?”

“You put them in Chinese sweet and sour pork.”

The jeans shop owner sounded exhausted because he had put a lot of effort into removing the pineapple's thick skin with a knife.

Meanwhile, Kanzaki stared in shock at those two who were focused solely on the food.

"Shall we report on our progress first?"

"Ugh, it was a huge pain in the ass," said the shop owner waving his hand back and forth. "When I was speaking with a worker at a souvenir shop, an old woman with a kitchen knife was glaring at me from within the shop while the show girl just stood there smiling. It was like something out of one of Japan's Yokomizo mysteries."

"It was more or less the same for me," Kanzaki said smoothly. "They seemed more hostile than wary. But at the same time, it was not like they were simply trying to randomly pick a fight. It seemed like the atmosphere where a girl like me would get into more trouble than you."

The tour guide girl looked confused as she ate the hot pineapple.

"Umm, I left this to you two since you are experts at this, but were you able to get any information from them like that?"

"Getting an honest answer back from a straight question is actually rather rare." Kanzaki reached for a skewer covered in meat and vegetables. "After all, we do not have any official authority like the police. Well, technically we do, but it isn't something we can just announce to normal people. With normal people, we cannot do anything about it if they evade the questions."

"The perverts at Necessarius do not trust what people say all that much. After all, there are bitter memories of lots of people being killed due to the 'confessions' forced out using torture during the witch hunts. Now, they have established methods of gathering information from silence."

"There is a difference between information you truly do not know and information you know but are hiding. …We of course cannot see through expert liars, but they were not that skilled."

The three of them continued that dangerous conversation while eating that food that was covered in only salt and pepper and would likely make a good memory for a trip to a tropical country.

"You mentioned before that the indigenous religion had some Christian culture mixed in, right? Well, from the residents' manner of speaking, I have detected a hint of a cargo cult as well."

"?"

The tour guide frowned and the shop owner sighed before answering.

“The term originally comes from an island well south of here. It was a religion created by Pacific islanders that were persecuted by the European countries during the 16th century. Their doctrine said that it was not right for the Europeans to have such wonderful tools and that those tools must have been gifts that the gods had intended to distribute evenly but the Europeans had stolen.”

“They ended up taking back the things the white men were monopolizing because they felt the gifts should be everyone’s and they had to make things even.”

The tour guide started to understand but then she started shaking her head.

“But Uphill Island only rose to the surface due to a change in the earth’s crust 50 years ago. I thought they did not have anything to do with traditions that had ancient roots.”

“The main cargo cult continued even until after the war. And well…this island’s cargo cult has been altered somewhat. They feel that it is not right for only the other islands to get favorable treatment. They feel that the other islands have stolen the gifts that they should have gotten from the god that should bless this newly born island.”

“By the way, the ‘other islands’ refers to everything other than Uphill Island. Everything from Antarctica to Eurasia is treated as an island. Over the course of 50 years of discrimination, their values have become nicely cemented in place.”

It seemed there was a rather powerful complex at the roots of the island.

And…

“A lot of them seem to see this cargo cult as just an abstract idea…but there are also those who look like they want weapons and power with which to carry out that abstract idea using concrete actions.”

“They are avoiding getting into an actual argument despite their hostility because they fear having the plan they are preparing being destroyed if some problem were to occur.”

Kanzaki’s words made the tour guide’s breath catch in her throat.

“The plan they are preparing…?” She seemed reluctant to continue and she chose her words carefully. “Are you saying all of the islanders know about magic?”

“I’m sure only a few understand that kind of mystical phenomenon can actually occur, but they definitely have a vague sense of expectation. Even if they do not know about magic, they know that a powerful weapon is being prepared somewhere.”

“It’s odd,” the shop owner said. “If you stay on this small island, a record will remain in the hotel. The residents are much too hostile to let someone stay at their houses and staying outdoors would stand out in its own way. …And yet there is no sign of the magician who is supposed to be here. There isn’t even a record of him staying at the hotel under a fake name.”

“Well, magic can be used to thoroughly hide one’s presence. Is it still too hard to imagine that not a single person has seen this magician?”

“It’s a waste of effort. Preparing a large scale temple or spiritual item will be taxing enough as it is. If this magician was also using concealing magic 24 hours a day without resting for even a second, would he be able to give his full attention to his work? He would complete his preparations much more quickly if he just created a fake identity and stayed at the hotel.”

“The magician is staying somewhere on this island and carrying out his or her work. It would be best to assume the residents of the island are hiding him. Whether he is actually staying in the hotel or in someone’s house is unknown,” Kanzaki said before taking a sip of orange juice that appeared to be from concentrate and was likely intended for tourists. “What exactly do you think this magician is preparing?”

“Eh? Well…” The tour guide girl thought for a bit. “This person came all the way here to do this, so maybe it has something to do with the cargo cult unique to Uphill Island…”

“Uphill Island’s imitator cargo cult is basically an outlet for the complex caused by the discord with neighboring islands in recent years. Compared to other islands’ cargo cults, it has little history behind it and does not have much magical merit. Necessarius would not send a Saint to the other side of the world for something like that.”

“Then does it have something to do with the indigenous polytheistic religion that has been passed down in this area for ages? I believe it was centered on a prayer to artificially receive the blessing of the sea.”

“It’s not that either. The important items for that indigenous religion are spread across the surrounding islands more than on Uphill Island. As Kanzaki said, the residents of this island are normal people who are safely distanced from magic. That also means that none of the people here are that religion’s equivalent of a priest. …That may be part of the reason why Uphill Island was looked down on by the other islands and ended up supporting themselves with their cargo cult.”

Upon hearing the shop owner’s words, the tour guide looked even more confused.

Kanzaki sighed.

“It is related to the Christianity that entered during the Age of Exploration.”

“?”

“It is not the indigenous religion and it is not the cargo cult, so that just leaves the foundation. …And that makes the higher ups’ actions make more sense. Great destruction is going to be carried out by their own Christian techniques rather than with some magic from a religion they have nothing to do with. I can see why they would send out a Saint in that case.”

“Our selfish predecessors from the Age of Exploration may have left a parting gift…or rather, some kind of immovable relic.”

“B-but…” The tour guide girl sounded forlorn. “Uphill Island only rose to the surface 50 years ago. The Age of Exploration was centuries ago. The island did not exist back then. How were they supposed to leave something here?”

“We can use that fact as a hint,” Kanzaki immediately replied. “Uphill Island was originally a rock about 3 meters across, remember? In that case, whatever our predecessors from the Age of Exploration did here, it had to have been on that rock.”

Part 4

Uphill Island had risen to surface due to a change in the earth’s crust caused by the eruption of a submarine volcano 50 years before. Before that, that area of the sea had been very dangerous with countless rocks sticking up to within a meter of the water’s surface. Those rocks had torn holes in the bottom of ships that had gone out to fish at night and many people had drowned. That may have been an additional reason for Uphill Island to be considered ominous and creepy.

During that time, a small rock only 3 meters across had stuck up within that dangerous area. Their predecessors from the Age of Exploration had left something there. It was possible that something was the treasure from a ship the rocks had torn a hole in and was starting to sink. Or they may have left a sign to show that they had conquered even that dangerous area that had killed so many and that even the local islanders feared.

The orange of twilight was clear in the sky.

Kanzaki looked at the scenery before her.

(There really is nothing here.)

She muttered that honest impression but only in her heart.

That area that had once been filled with seawater had become an expanse of land just like the other parts of the island. It looked more like a dried up lake than it did a land of blessings.

Was it even correct to call that area Uphill Island?

It was probably related to when the island rose to the surface, but the area Kanzaki was in was separated by seawater like a broken cookie. The seawater bisecting the land was only about a meter across and 20 centimeters deep, but the area on the other side could still officially be classified as a different island.

There was no village in that area that could be called a small separate island. There were no paved roads either. The area was nothing but white sand and black rocks. Even the vegetation was sparse. That may have helped add to the dried up lake image.

The jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl were not there.

As the odds were high that she would make contact with the magician, the rest lay solely with Kanzaki. Her companions had their own special skills, but they would likely just get in her way when came down to a straight fight. She had no choice but to fight alongside them when it came to a sudden fight, but it was more efficient to make sure she was in a situation where she could fully wield her powers as a Saint if she was bringing the fight to someone else.

She looked around.

Kanzaki had a long Japanese sword hidden inside a water ski case as well as the skis themselves. She was also wearing the swimsuit meant to help her blend into the background. She spotted her target without much difficulty.

A black rock stuck straight up in the middle of that area that otherwise gave an impression of being completely flat. It was about 3 meters across and 5 meters high. The island was said to have suddenly risen up due to a submarine volcano, but it had likely only risen a few meters.

That black rock had been the only part of the island sticking up from the surface for thousands of years.

Someone was crouched down atop it.

They were likely carrying out some kind of “work”.

Kanzaki felt the person looked like a powerful beast standing silently atop the rock.

The person was a girl of about 10.

She was not a local person. She seemed to have a bit of a tan, but she was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed white girl. Her clothes were also clearly not those of the locals. She was wearing what looked like a short dress, but Kanzaki noticed that the crest of a tailor with a British royal warrant was unassumingly embroidered near the hem of the skirt.

"…A British magician of all things. Just a Christian relic of the Age of Exploration did not seem persuasive enough to me, but this makes more sense. I can truly see why I was dispatched now."

"Who are you?" asked the girl in a quiet voice.

Kanzaki did not respond and continued from where she had left off.

"Since you're also a British magician, I assume you know why I was dispatched. And since you are working to reactivate a Christian relic brought here during the Age of Exploration, I cannot just treat you like a mere child."

"…"

"There is no need for us to fight, but that is really up to you. Once they have been determined to be hostile, Necessarius will work to defeat a magician with any means necessary regardless of the age or gender of said magician."

That also meant that if the girl showed no clear signs of hostility and obeyed, they would not have to fight…but had the girl understood that much?

Kanzaki naturally reached for the water ski case and the girl narrowed her eyes slightly.

"I see. In that case, I will have to deal with this seriously as well."

As soon as she heard the girl's words, Kanzaki felt something unpleasant run by under her skin.

"…"

The five fingers of Kanzaki's right hand entered the case as smoothly as if they were separate beings. She made preparations to get in at least seven strikes before the girl had time to pull out a spiritual item to use as a weapon, chant a spell, or make a seal with her fingertips.

Theoretically, it should have been enough.

And yet something like a black stain appeared within Kanzaki Kaori's heart. If Necessarius's information was correct, that girl was putting together a massively destructive spiritual weapon and it was highly possible that weapon was completely under her control. If that was true, the girl before her eyes would have power greatly exceeding the individual level. She would have the power to blow away a mountain range and turn it into a giant crater with a single command.

No.

It would actually be odd if she *didn't* have power on that level.

If she did not, a Saint like Kanzaki would not have been dispatched.

In other words, the girl had that much value and was that dangerous.

Kanzaki naturally strengthened her grip on the handle of the blade as it lay within its scabbard.

She needed to calculate the timing with which the girl would bring out the controller for the massively destructive spiritual item.

And…

In that tense moment as Kanzaki prepared for battle, the girl spoke from atop the rock.

"But that's only if this piece of junk was really a Christian relic."

Kanzaki almost let out a questioning voice.

Kanzaki continued to remain prepared for a fight, but the girl remained crouched over and pointed next to her as if indicating a seat next to her.

"C'mere."

"…"

It could have been a trap.

Just to make sure, Kanzaki used her fingertips to surround the girl with seven wires before using the leg power of a Saint to jump up on the rock. The girl did not react. Kanzaki returned the wires to herself and looked where the girl was pointing.

"This is…?"

"Do these look like Christian symbols?"

The girl was pointing at something carved into the rock. They were special symbols constructed of almost entirely straight lines. They were most likely runes.

And they most likely had no magical meaning.

It was nothing more than a linguistic diagram. It was something like the Japanese A-I-U-E-O diagram. Next to each of the individual characters was a primitive cave painting-like mark resembling a simplified cow, torch, or whatever. Those likely signified what the characters meant.

“It’s Norse.”

“I can’t be! It’s true the Vikings had the sailing technology needed to discover the Americas before Columbus, but they were not at the level needed to get from Europe to Micronesia!!”

“No, not that. This was brought here by sailors during the Age of Exploration,” said the girl as she shook her head. “It was not just the islands on the Pacific that were persecuted during the Age of Exploration. Fleets of ships would arrive at places, utterly destroy their culture, and force the people there to join the Christian Church. Central and South America are the most well-known examples… You’re Japanese, right? Well, your country was not one of the ones that ended up completely subjugated.”

“…”

“When the European Christians gained the ability to sail to distant lands, they started to spread very quickly. Yet in the areas known today as Finland and Sweden, Norse mythology was widely believed in.”

The girl was wearing gloves so thin that they were only noticeable up close and she traced her finger across the runes carved into the rock through them.

“This was a method of resistance against that unwanted conversion. When Scandinavia was overrun by Christianity, they lost their right to freely worship their own gods. That was why they secretly joined the crew of a ship and left behind their last piece of defiance by leaving their faith behind in an unknown land that had not yet fallen under control of Christianity. They knew it would fail more often than not, but they still desperately left this behind praying it would leave a deep impression with someone who would sympathize with their culture.”

Kanzaki felt uncomfortable for some reason.

She was reminded of fools entering a graveyard where the deceased rested for no other reason than to test their courage.

The runes carved into the rock and the crude drawings next to them showed just how desperate the people who had carved them had been. And during the Age of Exploration that island had been nothing more than a 3 meter rock. Most likely, the Norse believers who had carved those runes had been afraid the Christians would destroy the carvings if they found them. That was why they had been forced to carve them in a place like that.

Kanzaki looked back at the girl’s face.

“Then you are…?”

“I do not have any special attachment to Norse mythology,” responded the girl. “I am simply investigating the traces of how much of an effect our religion had on cultures during the Age of Exploration. Central America, South America, India after investigating all those places, I have come to understand something.”

“…”

“Western historians write that their cultures came to an end due to invasions, but that is not true. It is true that they lost on a military front, but they did not give in on the cultural front. Even if the people of those cultures appeared to believe in Christianity, many of them hid symbols of their own religions, fused ideas, and made it so only others who knew of it could understand it. In other words, they encrypted their own culture in order to save it.”

The fact that someone would say that might have been a sort of salvation for those who had been overrun at the time.

The girl most likely did not think that she was giving any kind of salvation and she most likely did not think that she could give it so easily. But that was why it seemed there was a different kind of power in the words that naturally came from her mouth rather than being given in some kind of overblown speech.

After a bit of silence, Kanzaki finally relaxed the hand that held her sword’s grip.

There did not seem to be any danger.

“So, what will you do?” asked the girl. “The detailed excavation work for the runes left from the Age of Exploration is only about 50% done. If a long drawn out battle were to occur here, the unexcavated relic might be destroyed.”

“Kh.”

The girl’s words made it sound as if Kanzaki were grave robbing.

She then asked a simple question to Kanzaki.

“Is there still any reason for an Anglican magician to eliminate me?”

“If what you have said is true, there is no reason for us to fight. But…”

As Kanzaki spoke, she quickly moved her fingers.

A wire wrapped around the girl’s neck and a small white charm hung down like it was a necklace. The girl looked down at her own chest.

“?”

“It is something like a tracking device,” Kanzaki explained. “It allows me to monitor your location and your use of magic power. You appear to be innocent, but that means there is a good possibility of another magician being on this island. I would like for you to wear that until I find this other magician. …Essentially, it gives you an alibi. Even if an unnatural phenomenon occurs on this island, I can confirm that you were not related to it using this.”

“I see,” responded the girl simply.

She did not seem very interested in the fact that she was a suspect.

(So this wasn’t it. …But everywhere but this rock was pushed up by the change in the earth’s crust. Was there something like an undersea temple or was a special spiritual item brought over from a different island? I might need to start this investigation over from square one in those cases.)

Just as Kanzaki was sighing over how long the investigation was going to take, the girl suddenly spoke.

“You seem to think there is some kind of massively destructive spiritual item hidden on this island, but do you have any idea what effects it has?”

“…It would be easier to search for it if I knew what it was,” Kanzaki hesitantly admitted.

Without looking at Kanzaki, the girl traced her fingers across the runes.

“It probably has something to do with the ocean.”

“So something to do with the great flood…with Noah’s Ark?”

“You can find similar stories of a great flood damaging the world in religions across the world. And that includes the indigenous religion here.” the girl stared Kanzaki straight in the eye. “It is something that is deeply related to why Uphill Island is seen as ominous by the surrounding islands.”

“What…?”

“However, I’m not saying a magical construction is embedded in the island itself. …This island rose to the surface due to a change in the earth’s crust, right? But the change in the earth’s crust did more than that. All the other islands experienced a large earthquake, the villagers were swallowed up by a tsunami, and many, many people died. A change in the bottom of the ocean would change the ocean currents and cause the fish to leave the usual fishing spots. Amid all that, this one island seemed to be blessed as it rose to the surface. That is why the surrounding people detest this land.”

“In that case…”

“It all started with incidental misfortune, but it caused the people of this island to suffer for decades. That is why some might appear who would try to artificially cause a great flood to wash all the others away.”

If that was true, it was a truly promising lead.

Even if she did not know where the actual magician was, she could pick out the villagers who were cooperating with that magician. The most suspicious would be those who especially hated the surrounding islands and the small ruling class of the island.

(…This gives me an idea of what the cooperative islanders want, but what is the magician after?)

Kanzaki grabbed the water ski case with Shichiten Shichitou hidden within and went back over her own objective.

(I suppose I can ask the magician about that once I defeat him or her. If this is true, the magician is likely preparing the spiritual item to use it rather than to negotiate with someone.)

After thinking through that, Kanzaki spoke to the girl.

“That tracking device can be used to communicate with me. If you run into this magician, just put a drop of blood on the charm. That will connect it to me. But even so, try not to run into this magician alone.”

“…Don’t worry. I will remain here,” the girl said while moving a small brush either to excavate or preserve the runes.

Kanzaki narrowed her eyes slightly.

“True. It is possible the ones who carved that will watch over you if you remain here.”

“Yes. This is not as dangerous as you think it is.” The girl’s brush stopped. “After all, I can create a flood all on my own.”

In that instant, an explosive-sounding shockwave struck Kanzaki Kaori’s ears.

She was a Saint meaning she could freely use a portion of the Son of God’s power due to possessing similar bodily characteristics. Kanzaki could instantaneously enter a battle at speeds greater than the speed of sound, but even she could not deal with the sudden situation.

But that was no too surprising.

After all, a great deluge of water assaulted her ignoring the physical laws. The massive amount of saltwater that struck Kanzaki at the will of the magician swallowed up the deserted third of Uphill Island that was split off like a broken cookie.

The strangely red and viscous seawater sealed off Kanzaki's movements in an instant and swept her out to sea. She was already beyond the island. The water was hundreds of meters deep making it a hopeless place for a human.

The girl moderately but definitely giggled.

The deluge of water skillfully avoided the area around the girl.

She was up against a professional Necessarius magician.

And at her feet were the magically worthless runes desperately carved by the Norse believers during the Age of Exploration. They could not withstand that ridiculous strength.

That one strike was enough to smash them.

"Do you know how the world was created in Norse mythology?"

She cut her own fingertip and pressed it up against the charm at her neck.

As she had been told, its communication functionality activated, but she had no idea if Kanzaki could actually hear her.

"The material that made up the world was the corpse of a giant named Ymir. But when Odin and his brothers killed Ymir, a great amount of blood flowed from the wound. That flood of blood washed away everything of the old world that had existed before and caused a conflict with the giants who lost many of their brethren."

By manipulating the salt content and concentration of her blood to match that of seawater, the girl gained magical access to a great amount of seawater. A certain amount of the real power of something resided within an idol with similar form and properties. She accessed that power by using the same idolatry theory that existed between the cross used to execute the Son of God and the crosses atop churches.

Ymir's blood washed away the world and drowned giants who had power rivaling that of the gods. At that instant, the red liquid flowing within that girl's body may have become one with the blood of Ymir who had become the material the world was created from.

If that was all it was, it was simple.

However, there were many things preventing that from happening in reality.

If something with the same concentration and salt content as sea water was sent flowing through a human body, that person's internal organs would definitely be fatally damaged. The defensive spell used to prevent her body from being injured was more of a mystery than the one turning her blood into Ymir's.

The sound of something straining could be heard from the girl's right wrist.

The color of her palm changed.

It was now a kind of reddish purple.

The girl had concentrated the transformed blood in her palm and then stopped the flow of the blood so it did not circulate to the rest of her body. Basically, she had tied off her wrist with an invisible rope.

She could not keep that up for long.

Stopping the flow of blood would bring about necrosis in her cells. The concentration and salt content of the Ymir-ized blood would destroy the cells of her palm from the inside.

But many magicians would likely have admired the girl's achievements and may have even been jealous that she could pull something like that off on her own.

The destruction was overwhelming.

(It's over…)

Kanzaki was dead.

She had been swept around 3000 meters away.

While she was being swept along the island, her body would have struck sand and rocks countless times. When she was later swallowed up by the great currents in the sea, her arms and legs would have been thrown about randomly destroying all of the joints in her body. And by modifying the salt content and concentration of the seawater being magically controlled, it was given normally impossible viscosity. Even if she was still alive, Kanzaki would just sink unmoving to the depths of the ocean.

Even a Saint still had a normal human body.

As long as she had to inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, she would drown when brought underwater.

"…Ymir's Ocean."

The name of the spell that had killed her enemy escaped the girl's lips.

That was the identity of the large scale magic that had become known both inside and outside the island. Those who did not understand the situation seemed to think there was some kind of giant temple used to control that occult power, but there was not.

That heinous magic that could destroy the very terrain at the user's wish was a personal spell.

It should not be used against a normal magician much less a normal non-magic user. However, that changed when the magician was a member of the world powerful Necessarius.

"Didn't I tell you? Stories similar to Noah's Ark can be seen in religions across the world."

A noise came from around the girl's neck.

It was the sound of the wire necklace-like wire there quickly contracting in what may have been some form of final resistance. But before the wire could decapitate the girl, she slipped her own hands between her neck and the wire.

A shockingly large amount of blood sprayed out.

However, the girl's expression did not change in the slightest. She stretched out her arms to the left and right tearing the wire to pieces.

"..."

She looked down at her palms to see that they were partially torn to pieces. Yet the girl smiled. Against a wire wielded by a Saint, she had gotten off easy. Normally, even a steel framework would have been sliced clean through.

She brought her lips near the charm that was died red with blood and gave her last words to the dead.

"Well done. You just had the terrible luck to meet me on the sea."

She had said what she had to say.

The girl was about to cast aside the charm she no longer needed, but she froze partway through.

"No. I'm sorry to say that I was not given a life that was normal enough to call that bad luck."

A voice.

She heard a voice.

"…"

At first, the girl glared at the charm she had been about to cast aside, but then she quickly glanced over at the sea. She stared 3000 meters ahead. She stared off to an area of the sea that could easily hold a large tanker or aircraft carrier, not to mention a normal boat.

Normally, a large tsunami or other large waves would only affect the areas with a shallow coast.

However, the Ymir's Ocean she had caused was something else entirely. A wave that large had the destructive power to turn even a large ship to scraps.

However, there was no relief on her face.

At her distance, all objects looked like nothing more than dots.

However, that presence kept the girl's gaze fixed on it.

She could see the girl who should have drowned standing atop the ocean surface.

"Do you know of the Norse god Ullr?"

The voice was calm.

The girl recognized it as Kanzaki Kaori's voice.

"He is an ancient god who was believed in even before Odin. In Danish, his name is Ollerus. So much has been lost about him that it is not even clear what role he had as a god, but some scholars categorize him as the god of hunting and skiing."

(It can't be…!!)

The girl wrinkled her brow and distorted her face as she stared off at the distant sea and then she confirmed it.

Water skis.

Kanzaki was not standing atop the sea. She was unnaturally undulating up and down as she used only two skis to ride a wave big enough to capsize a battleship. Water skis were normally pulled forward by something like a motorboat, but Kanzaki did not need that. She was keeping her balance by using the power of the large wave that would crush a normal human's body.

"R-ridiculous…!!"

“Is it? Ullr is one of the Æsir just like Odin. He is a member of the race that was not swallowed up by the flood of Ymir’s blood. In that case, the fact that the ski god would not be swallowed up by the flood would have been inputted as a condition from the beginning. You can create as large a flood as you want, but as long as the spell is related to Ymir’s blood, you cannot drown me.”

After saying that, Kanzaki fell silent for a bit.

Finally, she started speaking again.

“Are you trying to save them?”

“…”

“Given your detailed knowledge of the persecution during the Age of Exploration, you must have worked to educate yourself on it. And more persecution is occurring before your very eyes. You cannot change the past, but you can change what is happening on this island right now. …Is that what you thought?”

“It is nothing that convenient.”

The girl laughed scornfully.

It was not clear if the scorn was directed at Kanzaki’s words or at the reason for her own actions.

“A dangerous balance has been kept between Uphill Island and the surrounding islands. Ever since this island rose to the surface fifty years ago, there has been a conflict between the surrounding discrimination and the desire to turn that around. Even as the waves of modernization filled the islands bringing the construction of an international airport and making this a tourist spot, their antagonism continued beneath the surface.” The girl fell silent for a brief moment before continuing. “And I skewed that balance by having this spell and casually coming here for research. I was careless and neglected to use a people clearing spell because no one ever came near the area in which I was working on the excavation. I was seen altering the ocean currents slightly in order to prevent the waves from wearing away the relic carved into the stone.”

Similar to most islands, Uphill Island had a legend related to the ocean and flooding. And Uphill Island had actually been created due to a change in the Earth’s crust. It would have been odd if they did not have a story about the sea and the land.

And then a girl who could manipulate the ocean had appeared.

The islanders had surely known that it was a mystical phenomenon, but they had not known exactly what it was the girl had done. And because they did not understand, they had associated it with their own story. They had decided the girl was a messenger sent to protect the island.

“The residents of Uphill Island believe that they can overturn the power balance if I am here. And the surrounding islands have decided that they will surely be drowned if things remain as they are. …With the situation as it is, the people of Uphill Island would be lynched if I were to leave. Without exaggerating, I can say that all of them would likely be killed.”

“I see.” Kanzaki sighed. “Even so, I have one thing to say to you. Even if it is necessary to solve this problem, you are a truly horrible person if you would use that spell against the normal people of these islands.”

After speaking, Kanzaki’s body explosively accelerated. She headed in a straight line for the island. A massive amount of seawater should have been under the girl’s control, but something else was unnaturally interrupting. The giant wave pushed Kanzaki forward as if the magic itself was raising the white flag and saying it could not oppose a Saint.

“I will be heading for you now,” said Kanzaki Kaori declaring her intentions in an oddly kind voice.

Her gentle voice sent a chill across the girl’s entire body.

“Do not worry. I will make sure to defeat you in a single blow.”

“!!”

The girl held her trembling and bloody hands forward.

She still had a trump card left.

“Don’t underestimate Ymir’s Ocean!!”

In response to the girl’s shout, something shot up from the ocean surface. It was a giant spike about 3 meters across and 20 meters long. It headed in a trajectory straight up from below Kanzaki as if to turn her to mincemeat. But…

“You should not underestimate a Saint.”

“Wha—?”

Just before the spike hit, Kanzaki twisted the trajectory of her water skis and evaded it with the least amount of motion. The girl sent a second and third spike, but Kanzaki moved slightly right and left to evade them. In fact, she even used the momentum of the fired spikes to jump forward a few dozen meters.

“Do you really think you can kill me with something like a pillar of salt?”

“I *will* kill you with a pillar of salt!!”

As Kanzaki jumped through the air, the girl moved her fingers complexly. Her reddish purple right wrist turned even darker.

More salt spikes fired up from the ocean surface.

And it was not just 2 or 3.

Enough spikes appeared to cover the ocean surface in their white color and they flew toward Kanzaki like surface-to-air missiles.

But…

“This is no different.”

Kanzaki swung her body around in midair and dodged one of the giant spikes at the last second. She continued to spin her body around and around and around and around as if she were performing some kind of trick. In doing so, she avoided the giant spikes one after another.

She then landed back on the water.

She did not lose her balance even for an instant and she used the crater-like surges from the firing of the giant spikes to accelerate more and more toward the island.

“…!!”

The girl’s breathing caught in her throat due to her tension and her fingertips unnaturally trembled in a way that had nothing to do with performing magic.

It was not enough.

It was not an issue of distance. Washing her away in a flood had not been enough. Using giant spikes made of condensed salt crystals had not been enough. She could not defeat her like that. Even if you played 100 rounds of rock-paper-scissors, you could not win if you could only use rock.

Yet she could not stop.

She knew she could not win, but that was no reason to stop.

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

The girl cried out and activated Ymir’s Ocean with everything she had.

A great flood washing away everything on that part of the island once more flowed toward Kanzaki Kaori.

But it had the opposite effect.

The great flood crashed atop the island that normally had no seawater covering it. Kanzaki Kaori finally arrived at Uphill Island while heading across that very water.

There was no longer any way to stop Kanzaki.

Atop her skis, Kanzaki headed straight for the girl while moving faster than a low-end sports car.

And then the girl saw Kanzaki Kaori reach for the handle of her sword.

But that was the limit of what the girl could comprehend.

Immediately afterwards, a dull shock assaulted the core of the girl's body.

In an instant, the girl's consciousness was knocked away without her even knowing if she had been struck with the back of the sword or by the scabbard.

Part 5

The unnatural tide assaulting Uphill Island disappeared when the girl lost consciousness. The uninhabited third of the island had been temporarily swallowed up by the waves, but the rocks and sand had already lost all moisture returning the island to its natural state. No one would believe the area had been covered in water just before.

"…Have you cooled your head?" asked Kanzaki Kaori. "If you tried to save Uphill Island by attacking the surrounding islands with that spell, that would be wrong. If you actually pulled it off, an even stronger magician would be called in. And that magician could be from an anti-magician organization like me or one hired by the surrounding islands."

There was bitterness in her tone and it may have been because she was a Saint.

She may have once wielded her powers as a Saint to attempt to accomplish something in a similar way.

"There is no such thing as an absolute trump card. If there was, the person who held it could become a king or even a god. If incomplete magicians such as us tried to obtain one, we would just be starting an arms race that would continue until one side was defeated."

“I…” The girl moved only her lips as she lay on the ground with somehow emotionless eyes. “I know that. But there are people who do not. There are people who believe they can escape their circumstances if I am here and there are people who think their lives will be utterly destroyed if I am here. Those people will not listen to what I say.”

“Then what will you do?” Kanzaki asked bluntly. “Will you leave this island with us?”

“…”

After thinking for a bit, the girl shook her head.

She knew what she had to do.

She would resolve the misunderstandings and erroneously expanded hopes on her own. She would return the relationship between Uphill Island and the surrounding islands to what it was before she arrived. That was the only way to save them. Washing away the surrounding islands with Ymir’s Ocean was out of the question and leaving Uphill Island without doing anything would just lead to the people of the island being killed.

If she understood that, the girl might be able to actually save the people of Uphill Island.

But not with violence.

She had to find a way to resolve the problem with words.

And then…

“…?”

Kanzaki heard something like a tremor in the earth. The low sound was coming from such a distance that it seemed to be coming from beyond the horizon. It gave her an odd feeling like she was hearing it more through the shaking of the ground under her feet than through a vibration of her eardrums.

But that was not it.

It was not just a tremor.

(It can’t be…)

Kanzaki felt her throat dry up.

The girl looked away from Kanzaki.

(Is this…the sound of people cheering?)

Just as Kanzaki Kaori blankly thought that…

“Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

The source of the noise had to be a few kilometers away. It sounded as if it was coming from multiple directions rather than just straight ahead.

Kanzaki’s entire body was shaken by that repulsive cheer that was explosively filled with exaltation but at the same time rooted in nothing but negative feelings. If the soul truly existed that voice would have covered it in mud in an instant. The cry came from the residents of Uphill Island. The supernatural phenomenon of Ymir’s Ocean had finally appeared before them. They cheered as they truly believed that its violent destruction would sweep away their enemies and lead them to happiness.

Both adults and children, both men and women, and likely both babies and the elderly cheered.

And yet there was no need to draw a line between friend and foe.

Every village was likely filled to the brim with unnatural enthusiasm. An uncommon energy was needed to emit a cheer that reached so far and shook the earth like that. Sweat would be flowing from their bodies as they let loose that cry of pleasure and superiority from the depths of their guts to the tops of their throats. When she heard it, Kanzaki Kaori truly thought her body would freeze.

“Do you understand now?” said the defeated girl with a frail smile on her face. “That is what I must now fight.”

Part 6

Kanzaki and the others sat silently on the airplane home.

The girl was still on the island.

Was it even possible for her to persuade them?

If she succeeded in that, it was possible she would acquire the key needed to peacefully mend the relationship between Uphill Island and the surrounding islands.

However, if the residents of Uphill Island insisted on continuing the conflict…

Most likely, the girl would give up on them. She would give up and quietly leave the island. After that, it was clear what kind of tragedy would befall Uphill Island given the cracks in its relationship with the surrounding islands.

The islanders could not stop that.

Even if there were so many people on Uphill Island and the girl was just an individual, she had the power as a magician to conquer the island in a single strike.

“Was that really okay?” asked the jeans shop owner suddenly. “If you captured the magician, you would have received additional compensation, right? And if that girl can cause a great flood all on her own, then this situation hasn’t even been resolved.”

“No, the incident is over.” Kanzaki shook her head. “At the very least, there is no longer a magician on that island who will use Ymir’s Ocean lightly.”

As Kanzaki gave that response, she silently prayed that the people of the island would not cause any more disasters.

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第③巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第三話

環境保護の真意

RULIC_letters.

CHAPTER 3

The True Meaning of Environmental Protection.

RULIC_letters.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

We have confirmed signs of a coming attack by a magician on a steelworks in the industrial district of a harbor city in Denmark.

The steelworks is part of the science side and a cooperative institution of Academy City, so the spread of damages could cause deep cracks to appear between the magic side and the science side.

Please head to the area and stop the magician.

The top priority in this operation is to prevent any damages to the steelworks. You should of course use your full strength, but please avoid damaging the facility as a result.

♦

"I like it. It's nice and simple," said the jeans shop owner sounding bored.

He stared at the red lights flashing on the top of the distant smokestacks in the darkness just after sunset.

"There's no investigation and we don't have to track anyone down. You just charge in there and fight. …In fact, is there any reason for the two of us to be here with you? I would think your Saintly powers would be more than enough."

"Why are you so bloodthirsty?" asked Kanzaki sounding exasperated, but the tour guide girl had an idea as to why.

"…Um, is your work at the jeans shop in trouble? Before, you were saying you had customers emailing you to complain about how long it was taking you to ship things."

"Heh heh heh. Don't worry. After emailing back and forth again and again, I've become something like an email friend of that middle schooler, Saten-chan. Although it doesn't feel right as a professional to have an angry customer worrying about me."

The shop owner sounded truly fed up with the situation as he spoke.

The Danish harbor was wrapped in a cold fog. The fog had an odd stickiness to it that made one think there was something more to it than simple moisture. It may have been because they were in the industrial district. Compared to a tropical island in Micronesia, the air was heavy and uncomfortable like they had a wet blanket hanging over their heads.

The only things visible in the sky were lead-colored clouds.

It all gave the impression of a dark and dank area that had been altered due to the atmosphere absorbing the smoke. However, they did not know what the scientific reasons were.

Meanwhile, Kanzaki's expression remained unchanged at the unpleasant situation as she honestly answered the shop owner's question.

She was answering his first question of why it would not be over simply by sending a Saint to the battlefield.

"The enemy uses rune magic and he seems to enjoy setting up runes around his target facility as if they were bombs and then detonating them all at once. As such, you will be helping with the search for and destruction of the runes."

"Ugeh." The shop owner had a very displeased look on his face. "…And why do we know his methods before we have even come across him?"

"He has carried out similar attacks in the past and the information is in the database."

"Shit," the shop owner cursed.

The tour guide girl started flipping through her memo pad.

"The enemy has already used the same method to destroy a French thermal power station, a German petrochemical complex, and a Finnish oil platform. Beforehand, he uses a few bits of magic to analyze the layout of the facility, and those bits of magic are the signs that were detected this time."

"Then they should send out a large Anglican unit rather than just us three. Surely that would raise the odds of finding all of the runes."

“O-one of the higher ups said the criminal would not appear if we did that and then we could not catch him.”

“C’mon, little lady. Isn’t the reason we’re doing this so that the relationship with Academy City and the rest of the science side doesn’t worsen?” said the shop owner looking as if his irritation was at its maximum.

In that end, that was as far as the “concern” for the other side went for either the magic side or the science side. The shop owner wiped the dampness of the unpleasant fog from his face as he contemplated pretending to go off in search of runes while actually going off to take a nap.

(…Dammit. My hair and clothes are soaking wet. Hm? Wet clothes…?)

The shop owner seemed to have realized something as he slowly looked back in Kanzaki’s direction.

She was wearing a short sleeve T-shirt tied off to the side making her navel visible and special jeans that had one leg cut off all the way up to the base of her thigh.

Currently, that harbor area was wrapped in a thick fog that soaked the hair and clothes of anyone there.

That meant…

(Oooohhhh!! I can see through it! Just a bit more and I’ll definitely be able to see through it!! There isn’t enough moisture yet for it to be definite, but I should at least be able to see her bra before long…!! Wait, does Kanzaki even wear a bra? I-I might be able to see something even more…!?)

“??? Is something the matter?”

Kanzaki looked over at him surprisingly defenselessly and the shop owner frantically shook his head.

Even then, an angel and a devil were beginning to argue within his head.

The devil was a mini mental Kanzaki wearing a black leotard, with wings like a bat, and with an arrow-like tail.

“Hey, hey. You were brought to this industrial district that stinks of oil in order to protect the precious Saint and to help deal with some bombs. What’s wrong with getting something like this in return?”

The angel was a mini mental Kanzaki wearing sexy white swimsuit that looked as if it was made of strings, with wings like a swan, and with a golden halo.

“Wait! You must not do that! She is that defenseless because she trusts you. Can you really betray those warm feelings of hers!?”

The shop owner held his head in his hands.

(Wait, why is the angel the sexier one!?)

The two mental Kanzakis then stopped arguing, turned toward the shop owner, and responded in unison.

“Hadn’t you already made up your mind by the point we appeared dressed like this?”

“Yes!! I will thoroughly cling to Kanzaki and stare at her wet tits!!”

“What are you saying all of a sudden!?”

The shop owner flew through the air due to a sudden kick.

The tour guide looked troubled as she looked back and forth between Kanzaki who started off on her own in anger and the shop owner who had been knocked away. Finally, she decided to give the injured one higher priority and ran over to the shop owner.

“Um, do you love Kanzaki?”

“You fool. How am I supposed to have proper romantic feelings for a monster that can see a bullet fired from a handgun and evade it?”

“Then why…?”

The tour guide looked confused and the shop owner grinned.

“Isn’t that obvious? I just have to see how much I can get of what’s leftover.”

“I see, I see. I now know that you are just a horrible person.”

Part 2

Kanzaki and the others had come to an area of the industrial district that specialized in iron and steel production. That field alone filled an area 7 kilometers square, so the heavy industry there was quite large.

“Compared to a petrochemical complex filled with oil tanks, this place is relatively safe,” said the tour guide girl who had temporarily settled the issue between Kanzaki and the shop owner.

The shop owner replied in shock, “How is this place safe? If a spark flies in here, the whole place will be in flames.”

“Eh? But most of the materials lying around are just iron ore. I didn’t think that kind of thing was flammable…”

“Do you know how much fuel they put in those blast furnaces to get enough heat to melt that iron ore that will not burn with a normal flame?” pointed out Kanzaki gently.

“Uuh…” the tour guide girl groaned out, but Kanzaki did not seem to notice.

“But with runes, that means…”

“It’s Norse mythology again,” the shop owner replied and the tour guide girl began hurriedly flipping through her memo pad. She may have wanted to restore their opinion of her.

“U-umm, it seems Norse cabals such as Those Who Prevent the Extermination of the World Tree and Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword have been active recently, but they do not seem to have anything to do with this incident.”

“…”

Kanzaki fell silent for a bit.

She doubted there was no connection at all, but there was no point in theorizing off of something that had no proof. And Norse mythology was major enough to be known at least in name to normal people who had no connection to magic. Of course, the more major the field, the more magicians and incidents related to it.

At any rate, she had to focus on accomplishing her mission.

She looked around once more to check on the battlefield.

“There certainly are a lot of smokestacks. It looks overcrowded even compared to normal steelworks.”

“That is because the demand for steel has increased.”

“Is that because military production is on the rise due to the tension between the science side and the magic side?”

“Technically, it’s because such a situation appears to be on the horizon so some people have started buying up iron and steel products. See how about a third of the facility looks brand new? It’s been expanded in a hurry due to the change in the era,” explained the shop owner sounding bored.

He looked up at the smokestacks that were even then spewing gray smoke up into the fog.

“Just stopping the furnaces and cutting off the supply of fuel would cut down on the damage, wouldn’t it?”

“It is not so easy in reality. I have heard that blast furnaces like that must continue running 365 days a year. Apparently, reheating a furnace that has cooled costs quite a bit of money.”

“Yeah, I guess some of them have been running for over 20 years straight. I suppose they wouldn’t keep them going if there wasn’t a good reason.”

“20 years?” said the tour guide in a hysteric voice. “They’re putting out that much smoke every day? Wouldn’t that destroy the environment?”

“It seems most of what comes from the smokestacks is water vapor…but, well, it does keep coming out even after the work day ends and during days off, so it isn’t exactly kind to the earth. Apparently, the roofs of stone churches around here have been melted like stalactites due to acid rain.” The shop owner scratched at his head, snatched the map from the tour guide girl who could not keep up, and spread it out. “So where would the enemy have set up these runes?”

“Wouldn’t around the blast furnaces be the best place?”

“They would be easy to detonate, but the facility is 7 kilometers square. That wouldn’t be enough to turn the entire place into a sea of flames.”

“His goal is to bring a stop to the work of the steelworks. If all 15 blast furnaces at the center are destroyed, the facility will be unusable. Is there any need for him to burn away the entire facility?”

“It sure would be nice if terrorists were logical like that. Anyway, I think the pipelines bringing in fuel to the blast furnaces are suspicious. Especially the ones bringing in natural gas rather than coal. If he opened a hole here ahead of time, and lit the relatively heavy gases that spread out near the surface, the damage would spread quite a bit.”

“It’s possible, but that would bring in the risk of it being noticed before he carried out his attack. Unlike magic, natural gas can be detected by normal sensors.”

“Hmm… Is it overthinking things to think that he might try using flames to rapidly oxidize a large amount of iron ore in order to suffocate all of the people working here?”

“U-u-umm…”

Kanzaki and the shop owner turned around when the tour guide timidly raised her hand and spoke. Their eyes said “did she get left behind *again*?” but that did not seem to be what the tour guide was trying to say.

She was looking down at her feet with a troubled expression.

“…Is this thing here one of the runes this magician is supposed to have set up?”

Part 3

There was nothing even remotely resembling logic to it.

The tour guide was pointing at a completely normal asphalt road. The area was likely made to allow large trucks to easily make a U-turn because it was more like a gray plain that it was a road. Of course, there was no highly flammable natural gas or any coal storage areas near it. Even if something were to explode there, nothing would happen other than a few trucks having to take a slight detour.

There was no sign of the magician having tried to hide it.

There would be no problem if the workers saw it. There were no images or pieces of text that held clear malice. For someone who knew nothing of runes, the symbols used would actually look more like a mark used for some kind of construction work than some graffiti drawn by a delinquent.

The shop owner stared at the rune set up in the middle of that empty area for a bit before speaking.

“…Is there a power cable or a natural gas pipeline running below ground here?”

“I-I checked, but it does not seem so. It seems the sewer runs below here,” responded the tour guide girl while looking at a specialized map of underground constructions used by the water department.

“That means…” Kanzaki brought her hand to her chin. “The magician is not setting up the runes in areas that will especially easily start fires. He might be setting the runes all across the steelworks facility in order to blow the entire thing away.”

“With something like this?” the shop owner said in shock.

Kanzaki understood what he meant.

It was just too complex.

It was a magic circle with a diameter of around 40 cm. However, something completely different from a pentagram was carved within the circle. Detailed blood vessel-like patterns completely filled the circle from its outer edge to the center. The patterns both large and small indicated various runes. It looked a bit like a trompe l'oeil. You would think you saw one rune but changing your view would allow you to see a completely different rune in a different place. By focusing on and looking at things in different ways, the same lines could be seen as different parts.

Some of them were likely dummies and some were likely the real thing.

Something that took a lot of time to set up would take just as long to get rid of. If similar runes were set up all over the 7 kilometer steelworks, they would not be able to remove all of the magic circles before the magician blew them up even if they did know where they all were.

However, that was only if magic circles of that complexity were truly set up over the entire facility.

“Could it be that,” the jeans shop owner said timidly, “the guy who set these up is the type to get caught up in the details and lose sight of the big picture?”

“N-no. He has already blown up three industrial facilities with this same method. If he truly was that kind of idiot, I would think he would have failed on the first one,” said the tour guide standing up for the enemy for some reason.

Kanzaki crouched down and observed the magic circle set up on the ground.

“…The magician has this rune carved and yet he has not detonated it. That may mean his preparations are not complete.”

“It would take 5 hours per location to carve something like this. How many years was this magician planning to take in order to blow up this facility,” said the shop owner in exasperation.

That was when the tour guide girl got a slightly puzzled look on her face.

“Huh?”

“What?”

“Well, it would take a very long time to prepare just one of these magic circles, right?”

“Yes, and?”

“Um, well…” The tour guide seemed troubled. “If someone was setting up these magic circles all across this 7 kilometer facility, would they really just go in order from one side to the other like an inkjet printer? Wouldn’t human mentality normally lead one to start with the important places and move on to the lower priority areas later?”

“In other words…?”

“Wouldn’t he only set a circle up in a low priority place like this after he had already finished all the important places long ago? Or am I overthinking this?”

Just as she said that, one of the distant smokestacks suddenly burst open at around the middle point.

An unbelievable amount of red flames spewed from the giant tube that was normally supposed to let out smoke. Flames also spewed from the “wound” at the center.

“He set one up that high!?”

“No, that was caused by the blast furnace at the base! Flames from there destroyed the smokestack from the inside!!” the shop owner yelled so that the explosive noise did not drown out his voice.

Even then, more explosions occurred near the storage tanks for the natural gas used as fuel as well as the silver pipelines stretching out from them.

(I have to stop this…!!)

As she viewed that scene of spewing flames and smoke and resounding screams and sirens, Kanzaki had that exceedingly decent thought. However, the overwhelming scene before her eyes caused her to forget one fundamental fact.

A magic circle just like the ones set up around the steelworks was located right below their feet.

There was a bright flash of light.

“…!?”

Before Kanzaki Kaori could say anything, crimson flames enveloped the three of them.

Part 4

The area looked like a bomber had passed by overhead.

The explosion had been at a level where those not in the direct range of the flames would be roasted by the high temperature blast along with those the flames themselves reached. Black smoke filled the air and it had an even more poisonous color to it than when the steelworks was running normally.

Amid all that, a portion of the flames were blown away from the inside along with a sound like a giant fan being waved. Kanzaki Kaori as well as the jeans shop owner and tour guide girl she had protected stepped out of the flames unscathed.

“Eh? Eh?”

The tour guide did not seem to understand what had happened to her.

“The runes used were Dagaz and Jera which mean day and summer respectively. By setting up a large number of those, he caused the heat and dryness to escalate which caused the ignition. In that case, we can locally rob it of its effectiveness by drawing out the magical meaning of the thick clouds and indicate this as an area hidden from the sun.”

“What would happen if you covered the rays of the sun up with your hand while frying ants with a magnifying glass?”

The tour guide had still looked confused after Kanzaki’s explanation, so the shop owner had added on that extra comment. He then ignored the tour guide who still did not quite get it and he looked over to Kanzaki.

“Do you know how much damage was done?”

“There had to have been at least some civilian casualties from that,” said Kanzaki Kaori in an emotionless voice.

An odd creaking sound came from the handle of her sword that she was gripping tightly.

“The responsibility clearly lies with the Necessarius higher ups who suggested this mission and us who followed their orders. We will take responsibility after this is all over.”

“Nicely said. When you eliminated the rune’s flames just now, you neutralized the other runes magically linked to this one, right? That should have been enough to prevent anyone from being killed.”

“We cannot be sure of that. And it is clear some had to have been injured.”

The shop owner felt Kanzaki wished she only had to fight magicians inside a set ring, but he made sure not to say so out loud. It was best not to provoke Kanzaki when she was like that.

“But what do we do now? It doesn’t look like the first wave completely took out the blast furnaces, but all 15 will be taken out if a few more waves come. We can’t remove the runes in time like this.”

“No, there is still a way.” Kanzaki shook her head. “If we find the magician who is activating them and defeat him, there will be no more damage regardless of how many more runes he has set up.”

“Is he even here? Surely he’s activating them remotely. He’ll have long since escaped to an area we can’t reach where he can activate his magic safely.”

“Not necessarily.”

Kanzaki pointed down at her feet.

The rune the magician had set up had been there just a bit before, but it had completely disappeared.

“I saw some tricks to increase the explosive force, but I did not see anything that would extend the effective activation distance. The magician is most likely sending out the orders from somewhere within the 7 kilometer facility.”

“But then he would get caught up in his own explosions.”

“That’s why he would be hiding within a safe area of the facility.” Kanzaki glanced around. “I’ve been thinking about why such a complex rune would be carved in such a meaningless place.”

“Does it have something to do with that safe area?”

“The safe area can easily be calculated out given where the explosions were…even with no knowledge of magic. The magician is trying to expand the damaged area by using the coal and natural gas used as fuel for the blast furnaces. In the end, you just have to think of it as a normal fire and find the places the flames and smoke do not reach.” As she spoke, she lightly tapped the soles of her boots on the ground. “This makes it simple to figure out where the magician is, so he decided to set runes up all over the 7 kilometer facility to make it seem as if there was no safe place. If we cannot determine where a safe place is, we cannot figure out where he is hiding. …However, the magician has set up the runes to detonate on his command, so his area remains safe as long as he does not send a detonation command to the runes around him. In other words…”

Using one hand, Kanzaki pulled out a nearby road sign for the large trucks that passed by in that area.

“He’s there!!”

As she shouted, she threw the sign like it was a javelin.

The sign flew over a kilometer through the air and stabbed into a normal-looking concrete wall.

But…

A small figure frantically jumped to the side. He seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. It had looked like someone hiding behind an invisible wall had frantically jumped out from behind that cover.

Kanzaki lowered her hips slightly and then chased after the magician as quickly as a bullet.

With that speed, the jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl could not cover for her. The tour guide girl spoke after they had been left behind like that.

“W-we were careless…but we can turn this around, right? Kanzaki is one of the world’s fewer than 20 Saints after all.”

“I’m not so sure this will end that easily,” responded the shop owner as he stared off in the direction Kanzaki had disappeared in. “This magician caused the explosions with runes, but he did not insist on sticking just with that. He also used the blast furnaces and natural gas in the steelworks to cause even more damage.”

“And what does that mean exactly…?”

“It means this magician knows the limits of his strength.”

The tour guide girl looked confused and the shop owner sighed before continuing.

“Instead of being filled with pride, he used everything he could in order to bring about the result he wanted. Do you really think a bastard like that is going to try to fight a Saint in a fair fight?”

Part 5

They had noticed him!!

The magician, a young man named Leasic, used all his strength to evade the road sign flying toward him, but that did not change what he had to do. The girl who had attacked him was likely a Saint. That threat was running his way at tremendous speed, but Leasic’s plan did not change.

Why had he gone out of his way to carve such complex runes? It was so that a magician could not easily dispel his explosive runes even if his attack was noticed.

Every part of his objective was collected there.

He could not allow himself to be led astray by a powerful enemy.

His objective was to stop the functioning of that steelworks as quickly and as accurately as possible.

"!!"

That was why Leasic ignored Kanzaki and continued to run to the side. He was headed for his next safe area. Leasic had set up more than one safe point within the facility so that he would not be caught up in the blasts he himself was creating.

Why had he not targeted the entire steelworks facility in the first blast?

The answer was the same as to why he had set up runes over the entire 7 kilometer facility. If he only had one safe area, that area could easily be found.

Leasic had divided his bombing plan into multiple stages.

When causing Explosion Set A he remained in Safe Area A, when causing Explosion Set B, he remained in Safe Area B, and when causing Explosion Set C, he remained in Safe Area C. For that purpose, he had prepared areas scattered throughout the facility based on the areas being blown up. Of course, when Explosion Set A went off, Safe Areas B and C would be affected by the blasts and Safe Area A would be filled with flames due to Explosion Set B. That way, once everything had gone off, it would look as if there had been no safe areas and people would assume the magician had been at a distance.

That was why he immediately headed for the next safe area.

The instant he reached it, he would of course detonate the next set of runes to blow away the blast furnaces and related equipment.

That safe area was right in front of him.

Leasic ran taking long strides.

Just three more steps.

Two more.

One more.

"...Too slow."

The instant Leasic detected that blurred voice, his body was already doubled over and flying to the side. After he had flown about 5 meters through the air, he finally heard the crash. It may have been a kick he had received. Despite having received the attack, Leasic had been unable to comprehend what exactly had happened to him.

His body fell to the ground, bounced two or three times, and finally came to a stop.

He heard an odd noise.

(C-cough…!? What was that? Are these…wires…?)

“I will only give you one warning, so listen carefully.”

Kanzaki stood over 10 meters away where Leasic had been just previously and her hand was on the handle of her sword.

“Cease your resistance and surrender. If you do not, I will sever your arms so you can no longer fight.”

“…”

Leasic glanced over at his arms that were half floating up in the air, but…

“You cannot turn this around,” Kanzaki said as if to bring a stop to his thoughts. “You seem to have prepared those exceedingly detailed magic circles that use special runes in an amazingly short time, but I already know how they work. You cannot escape the wires of my Nanasen using that.”

“So you realized it.”

“It was nothing more than a theory until I saw you.”

Kanzaki slowly lowered her center of gravity and looked at Leasic.

He was wearing a long coat and both sides of the coat stuck out unnaturally. He seemed to have some kind of large object tucked into his belt.

“Is that the power source for a laser grinder or amplification equipment? You hide a dismantled machine tool in your coat that allows you to carve out those complex patterns according to a program at the press of a button. Using that method, you can likely prepare one of those runes in less than 10 seconds.”

Basically, he was using the type of machine that automatically cut apart metal sheets in a factory. The exceedingly narrow arm could move more accurately than the print head of a copier and could complete that complex pattern in no time at all.

“That is a truly interesting method, but that laser technology is in violation of an agreement made between the magic side and the science side. …As a member of Necessarius, this means I have all the more reason to capture you.”

Given its size, Leasic’s machine likely did not have the same level of output as the ones that cut apart metal. All it could do was carve grooves a few millimeters deep. The rune circles carved in the ground were not given color by ink. The heat scorched them like a brand.

And…

“Do you really think I am going to give you even a few seconds of spare time? If you make any suspicious actions, I will immediately sever your arms.” There was no hesitation in Kanzaki’s voice. “Unlike in the past, it seems they can now carry out surgery that reattaches the nerves of a severed arm. I have no reason to hesitate. …Well, there are some parts of the nerve reattachment that need work.”

Kanzaki started to slowly and smoothly move her hand that held her sword.

And then Leasic smiled slightly.

“So you’ll take care of me afterwards. How kind of you.”

As he spoke, his gaze moved from his own arm and back toward Kanzaki.

“But I can tell you do not know how to kill someone.”

Immediately afterwards, both Leasic’s arms were severed at the shoulder.

“Wha—?”

Kanzaki was the one that cried out in surprise.

She had warned him that that she would sever his arms if he resisted, but she had not yet sent the final command to the wires.

Leasic himself had done that.

As proof, flames spewed from his shoulders due to some runes.

“Now nothing is stopping me.”

“Wait…!!”

This time, Kanzaki swung the wires with all her strength in an attempt to attack Leasic from all sides, but she did not make it in time. It was not an issue of her physical ability. Kanzaki’s speed had been lowered on the mental side.

Leasic's shoulders erupted even more forcefully.

His body was launched straight up as if it was a rocket. He made more of a huge sudden jump as if reverse bungee jumping than an elegant flight through the sky.

Using his wings of fire, Leasic landed atop a rectangular building's roof. He grinned thinly and he did not seem to hold any regret, hatred, fear, or unease over having lost his arms.

And then the magician Leasic detonated the second wave of runes.

Despite the detail and complexity of the runes he used, they were not especially destructive. All that effort was focused on making dummy designs that prevented anyone from reading what he was going to do from the runes he had carved.

The blast furnaces and smokestacks had not been blown away in a single explosion due to the intrinsic power of Leasic's magic. He was simply using the fuel that was already in the blast furnaces. Of course, there were control valves that made sure the proper fuel entered the furnaces in the proper amounts, but the shock of Leasic's explosions destroyed those control valves causing a great amount of fuel to enter the furnaces all at once. That was what blew them away. The smokestacks were destroyed because they could not withstand the internal pressure caused by the blasts from the furnaces.

Leasic did not care.

As long as he could carry out his objective, the means did not matter.

It did not matter if he was using the power of science.

He just had to utterly blow away the center of that scientific facility and blow up all of the blast furnaces.

But…

Even though Leasic had sent out the detonation command, not a single flame or shockwave exploded out from the steelworks.

"What…?"

Leasic looked confused.

He thought Kanzaki must have done something, but that did not seem to be the case. She was frowning as well.

Then he heard a voice.

It was a male voice belonging to someone who was not there and that Leasic had never met.

“You used too many tricks, you idiot.”

Leasic guessed that the man must have been backup or someone who had been waiting to ambush him.

He was not entirely wrong. The voice belonged to the jeans shop owner.

“I’ve heard of magicians who make laminated cards with runes on them so they can make hundreds or thousands of them in just a few seconds. They increase the strength of their magic with it, but if you ask me, that method creates too many openings. It’s the same as how even if you have strict security, you cannot eliminate the possibility of someone getting into your system if it is connected to the internet where people all over the world can access it.”

Where was the voice coming from?

The answer was simple. It was coming from one of the runes Leasic has set up. He had carved the runes over every part of the 7 kilometer facility and that included the roof Leasic was standing on. The man’s voice was coming from the roof below his feet.

Leasic’s expression twisted.

“You interfered…!!”

“Hey, Kanzaki. This wasn’t volunteer work. You owe me. Really, I was saved by the fact that the rune circles were made from a pattern. Thanks to that, an expert in magical clothing could somehow manage to find the connections.”

“Kh!!”

Leasic leaned over and checked on the rune at his feet. He noticed that one portion was colored an unnatural red. Most likely, every rune in the steelworks had changed in the same way. That was blocking Leasic’s commands. After analyzing that, Leasic grinned.

The method of interference was quick but crude.

He could remove something of that level. If he could remove that “color” filling the gap, he could regain control. He still had a way to continue his bombing. With that in mind, Leasic carefully manipulated the direction of the flames spewing from his shoulders and began working on interfering with the magic circle.

“Should you really be doing that?” said the man mockingly. “I doubt you can deal with our Saint at the same time.”

“!?”

Leasic immediately reacted, but he did not make it in time.

Kanzaki Kaori did not use her explosive leg strength to leap up onto the building’s roof. Given her physical abilities, she could easily do so, but she did not choose to.

She instead chose to use her seven wires.

They wrapped around Leasic’s body and swung him around like a morning star.

Kanzaki’s wires were made so they would normally slice straight through her opponent. They did not slice through Leasic’s body despite being wrapped around him most likely because he had activated some kind of defensive magic. In a certain way, that result showed just how skillful Leasic was as a magician.

However, what occurred afterwards destroyed every advantage he may have had.

A loud crash exploded out. After being swung around by the dozens of meters long wires, Leasic had been slammed straight into the asphalt ground. Cracks ran through the asphalt and small rock-like fragments flew up into the air.

Multiple wires dug deeply into Leasic’s body that had been bloodied in that single attack. Seeing that, Leasic caused even more flames to erupt from his shoulders. The steel wires floating in the air like a spider web were melted and torn apart.

(That wasn’t enough…?)

Kanzaki did not speak out loud and just frowned slightly.

His objective was to blow up the steelworks, not to defeat Kanzaki.

As such, Leasic quickly tried to move away from her and blow up another part of the facility. However, strength would not enter his body. Like a bird with broken wings, Leasic leapt up and then fell back to the ground.

“…”

Kanzaki gathered the broken wires and walked in Leasic’s direction.

“Ha ha… I won’t give up…”

Leasic drew back while showing his bloody teeth with a thin smile. From that movement, Kanzaki could tell that he could no longer carry out the actions he wanted to. He could not physically move properly and he could not function as a magician by refining magic power out of his life force.

At the very least, he was not in a state where he could defeat a Saint.

“I won’t give up. I must protect the earth.”

“Why are you going this far? The people working at this facility know nothing of the world of magic. And they are not producing weapons that will kill others.”

“And I’m supposed let this go because of that?”

Hatred appeared within his smile.

Words that seemed to be tinged with black left Leasic’s split lips.

“How can I do that? An attack or an invasion is not necessarily a simple matter of military force. The people here *are* eroding away the magic side.”

“..Eroding away?”

Kanzaki frowned.

That industrial district had never been a religious sacred ground in the past, so he could not be trying to drive people away for that reason. Also, the products of that science side facility were only used to make normal household products.

But then Leasic got to the real issue at hand.

“Did you know that this steelworks has expanded because the price of iron and steel is expected to greatly rise soon? For efficiency’s sake, the furnaces are kept running nonstop 365 days a year pumping out huge amounts of smoke the entire time.”

“You don’t mean…”

“They cause acid rain,” Leasic spat out. “My specialty is runes. And unlike other grimoires, the stone monuments for runes are built out in the open on hills or in plains. Do you know how many valuable resources have been lost in the last 20 years due to this concentrated acid rain?”

Kanzaki thought for a bit.

She had indeed gotten reports of stone buildings around the industrial district being worn away bit by bit due to the acid rain. Of course, the vast majority of environmental destruction was caused by the science side. From a certain point of view, that could be seen as the science side polluting the resources of the magic side for their own advantage. But…

“But the Original class grimoires that have true magical value cannot be destroyed by any means. They would not be lost due to simple acid rain.”

“So anything that isn’t an Original doesn’t matter?”

Leasic ground his teeth.

There was anguish in his voice that had not been there even when he had severed his own arms with his flames.

“The basic Futhark has only 24 characters. The secondary runes derived from it are said to be nothing more than literary additions developed later in order to make texts easier to read. As such, they are treated as having no occult value. But so what? Even if they cannot be used for magic, they are still valuable resources. They are not something I can allow to be lost! In fact, the magical runes are protected on their own by their power as Originals, so they will be fine even in 1000 years even if we just ignore them. The literary runes that do not have that advantage and could disappear at any time are the ones we need to protect with everything we have!!”

“What do you expect me to do now that I have heard that?” said Kanzaki in a cool voice as she shook her head. “Since you have brought a large number of people into danger, your methods have already failed. Do you really think I will agree with you?”

“Failed? You’re saying I’ve failed?”

“Bringing the steelworks to a complete stop may be difficult, but you made a fatal flaw by trying to do so with explosives. Even if you managed to stop the acid rain, the fuel and other materials released with the explosions will wash out into the sea and cause a different kind of pollution. Your actions will not save the environment. You have only made the one destroying the environment be you instead of the factory.”

“…”

Leasic stared blankly at her as flames continued to spew from where his arms should be. He then spoke sounding as if he was asking a truly honest question.

“How is that a problem?”

“…”

Kanzaki Kaori fell silent.

The cold atmosphere around her changed to something even deeper and sharper. Leasic continued speaking without noticing that. He seemed angry that she did not understand his point of view.

“That’s not it. What I care about is the rune monument. Who cares about the ocean? It can turn black with oil and all the fish and sea birds can die for all I care! C’mon, we don’t have time to worry about trivial things like that!! If we don’t do something soon, the rune monument will be destroyed! That precious stone monument is being damages as we speak!! What else matters!? Do you truly understand how serious this situation is!?”

Leasic then heard someone clicking their tongue.

It had come from Kanzaki.

It was a rare sound coming from that relatively polite girl.

“…I see.”

She sounded disappointed.

Kanzaki moved her lips and spoke as if she were truly fed up with the man.

“I had a feeling this was all there was to the environmental protection a selfish human was after.”

“H-heh. I won’t give up. Everyone around me is such a fool. No one else realizes how serious a problem this is and none of them even think of trying to solve it. That’s why I have to do this. If I don’t, there will be no saving the monument!!”

An explosive noise rang out and the intensity of the flames coming from Leasic’s shoulders increased.

However, he was not attempting to propel himself backwards so he could gain an opportunity to blow up the facility. He was using the explosive flames to carve into the asphalt and forcibly draw a new rune. That work would normally be carried out by the laser grinding machine tool, but he was using the flames from his shoulders that time.

But he did not complete the rune.

Kanzaki’s boot slammed into the center of the halfway completed magic circle. The leg strength of a Saint shattered the asphalt and destroyed the unfinished circle.

“Then we will preserve the monument.”

She squeezed the handle of her sword with enough force to make a creaking sound as she headed further forward.

Leasic had lost his last means of attack so he tried to fall back, but he could not make it in time. Kanzaki spoke in an extremely cold voice to Leasic who was looking at her with a stiffened expression.

“So it’s time you quit this.”

Part 6

A dull noise reverberated through every corner of the 7 kilometer square steelworks facility. After having been blown away, Leasic lay completely still. The flames erupting from his shoulders stopped and he slowly oozed blood. The jeans shop owner who had stayed at a distance during the fight looked at Leasic with an unpleasant look on his face. The tour guide girl covered her ears as if lightning had struck nearby.

“Is he okay? I think his ribs or maybe even his spine might be broken.”

“I was not that careless.”

Having completed that annoying job, Kanzaki left restraining Leasic to the jeans shop owner and turned toward the tour guide girl.

“When Leasic comes to, question him lightly and find out where the rune monument is. If we donate it to a museum, it will not be lost to the acid rain.”

“O-okay…”

The tour guide looked as if she could not grasp what Kanzaki was trying to do. Her questioning eyes seemed to be asking if it was necessary to go along with his demand now that he had been defeated.

“Everyone’s the same, aren’t they?” said the shop owner after returning from stopping Leasic’s bleeding and restraining him.

Kanzaki shook her head.

“Not necessarily.”

“If you truly want to preserve the environment, you just have to kill every single human. But you won’t choose that method. It all comes down to your own principles and point of view, so you’re just the same as everyone else. We all need to just do what we can together. If we set our goal too high, we’re just heading for failure.”

“I know…”

Kanzaki looked up toward the heavens.

As she stared up at the thick clouds, she spoke to no one in particular.

“God would be truly shocked if he heard these lukewarm slogans that only take into account what matters to humans.”

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第④巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第四話

いのちのあれこれ

ALFAR.

CHAPTER 4

This and That About Life.

ALFAR.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

A strategic point in northern Scotland called Brick Wharf has been occupied by an enemy force.

The enemy force is Alfar, a magical life form created by the magician who manages Brick Wharf. We have information that this Alfar possesses the intelligence and skills needed to use the facilities and equipment of Brick Wharf to create even more complex and high level magical life forms and large scale spiritual items. As such, we would like for you to suppress Alfar and take control of Brick Wharf before such trouble occurs.

Also, Brick Wharf functions as the center of the northern British defense line that holds back foreign invaders.

It is important that you resolve this problem before foreign forces learn of the situation and see it as an opportunity, but it is also possible Alfar is receiving support from such foreign forces. Carry out this mission with utmost caution.

♦

And so they headed to Scotland.

The United Kingdom was made up of the four cultures of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Scotland was the northernmost land in the United Kingdom and Brick Wharf was at the northernmost part of Scotland. It used that position to shoot down or sink any and all suspicious people who came to the island nation via sea or air.

Or it had until half a day prior.

“I thought we were finally back to England and then this,” complained the jeans shop owner. “I thought I was finally going to get some work done. I thought I was going to get to complete at least some of my huge backlog of orders. What the hell happened!? When am I going to be able to send jeans out to my customers!?”

A vein bulged out on the shop owner’s temple as he recalled the state of his business.

“And isn’t an attack on a hijacked magical fortress just a job for a Saint like Kanzaki!? There’s nothing for me to do!! In fact, if taking care of something does end up falling to me, we’re in big trouble!!”

“I-I am sorry about that, but the incident is not just going to wait,” said the tour guide girl awkwardly.

The shop owner weakly smiled in response.

“Heh heh. I’ve gotten so many complaints by email that the company that manages the mail server is even worried about me. But don’t worry. I am glad to see that middle school Saten-chan’s English has been getting better bit by bit.”

“Hmm. That makes it sound like her English is still not perfect. What level is she at?”

The shop owner answered her question by reading the latest email verbatim.

“Fuck your asshole.”

“Uuh. That certainly does get across the fact that she’s upset.”

At the side, Kanzaki silently listened to the tour guide girl’s lamenting words.

She had something that bothered her more than the business of the jeans shop.

“I can’t believe the ultra-long distance interception temple used to prevent invaders from the sea has been turned inland toward the UK…”

As Kanzaki said that, she was hiding within a small thicket about 3 kilometers from Brick Wharf. The effective range of Brick Wharf’s large scale magic was over 200 kilometers, but she had managed to get that close without Alfar noticing by sneaking from cover to cover.

In other words…

If she got even one centimeter closer to Brick Wharf, she would be immediately spotted and blown away by a ridiculously huge invisible bombardment.

As he hid within the same thicket, the jeans shop owner said, “So what exactly is Brick Wharf?”

The tour guide girl responded to his simple question while hiding within the same thicket.

“Apparently, it was originally a facility from the time of the Industrial Revolution. Later, the unused remnants of the harbor were taken by the Anglican Church and remodeled into a magical facility. It seems no one but Alfar is currently inside, so there is no fear of getting anyone else wrapped up in this.”

As she would be immediately shot by interception magic the second she stepped out of that thicket, the tour guide girl was naturally pushing on Kanzaki and the shop owner’s bodies.

Being pushed on annoyed the shop owner.

“Alfar, hm?”

“I would like to ask about that, too. What is ‘Alfar’? Is it someone’s name?”

“…I thought you were a tour guide. Aren’t you supposed to know all about cultures, common knowledge, and fads from all over the world so you can use that knowledge to help the combat magicians to accurately blend in? Or is Scandinavia outside of your area of expertise?”

“If you mock me, I’ll push you out of this thicket. I know what an Alfar is, but that can’t be what you mean, right? An Alfar is…”

“A girl with white skin, blonde hair, and long ears. You might be more familiar with the term elf,” responded a sickly-looking young man with pale skin.

He was the manager of Brick Wharf who had been kicked out by the Alfar in question. Of course, he was a magician.

His name seemed to be Slappar.

“Isn’t this thicket a little small to hide four people?” said the shop owner sounding annoyed.

“But do Alfar actually exist? Wasn’t there a report saying the similar Dvergr, or dwarves, were just a different race that had techniques of manufacturing metals that the Norse cultures did not have?”

“That was by Richard Brave, right? Isn’t he a stubborn magician colleague of yours?”

“To be honest, I did not create her on the basis of any firm theory. I found a fossil that held a legend that was at least similar. I extracted the information from there and used a giant laboratory flask to create her, so I do not know whether she is an Alfar or something else that is just similar to an Alfar. I do however know that she is not human. There are various legends about the Alfar, but I adjusted them to something like a contrast to the Dvergr. Due to that, she dislikes metal and underground areas.”

“You certainly do take your time to explain things. And there’s not enough room here. I can’t take it any longer. My ass is gonna stick out. Kanzaki, you move over that way a bit more! If you don’t, I’ll just embrace you here!!”

“…If you do that, I’ll slap you so hard you land in Brick Wharf.”

“No, I’m seriously at my limit with this pose!! If I can’t do that, I’m gonna end up with my head between the tour guide’s legs!!”

“Gyahh!! If you do that, I’ll kick you in the balls!!”

Due to those terrible objections, the shop owner was unable to move. The next thing he knew, Slappar was gently spreading his arms. He seemed to be welcoming the shop owner, but the shop owner shook his head.

“…Kanzaki. I don’t care if you slap me, can I please embrace you?”

“Do not say things like that with such a mild smile. Right now, we need to continue with the questioning.”

“What do you want to know?” asked Slappar as he hid in the thicket with the others.

Kanzaki pointed toward the distant Brick Wharf.

“What happened there and what is Alfar trying to do there?”

Part 2

In modern magic, breathing techniques and mental focus techniques were used to convert the magic user’s life force into magic power which could be used to perform various spells.

Surprisingly, the very magicians that did that had no clear answer as to what the soul was. There were a few prominent theories, but there was little proof for them. It could be thought of as similar to proving a truly difficult math equation.

And…

Even without understanding the mechanism of the soul, methods could be used to duplicate or mass produce it.

For example, scientists performing experiments in human cloning could duplicate the genetic information without understanding what a soul was.

For example, a doctor performing an organ transplant could provide a dying patient with vitality and add dozens of years to his life without knowing what a soul was.

Magicians too could create the physical body that acted as the container for the soul without understanding its workings.

That was known as a magical life form.

They were not life forms in the same way as masses of some kind of energy that existed in a different phase space such as angels and demons. Magical life forms were either subspecies created by a magician applying some kind of process to organic material or occasionally a brand new species created from only inorganic material. There was a seemingly unending variety of forms they could take.

The only material going into the creation of the aforementioned Alfar was a fossil, but she would not contain the same soul as the creature that had been fossilized.

“Yeah, I know the whole genre of creating magical life forms isn’t too popular anymore,” Slappar said with a laugh. “After all, there are just too many problems with it. The creation cost for just one is much too high and the lifespan is unstable so it isn’t unusual for one to die just after you create it. There’s also the problematic pattern where it can’t interact properly with the natural world and can therefore only live within the flask or test tube it was created in.”

Whether it was a clever beast or a long-living beautiful girl, magical life forms had one thing in common.

That was the fact that they had the ability of original thought. If one wanted to create a vacuum blade, there were various different processes that went into the spell and any portion that changed on its own could cause it to backfire. If a single order had its method randomly changed, that small difference could affect the entire ceremony and could even put the magic user’s life at risk.

Instead of focusing on an unstable magical life form, it was better to use the same amount of effort to create a spiritual item such as a staff or sword that reinforced the magician’s own abilities.

(Tools with a human-shaped terminal such as golems are created with magic and they are much more convenient because they can be quickly created and quickly destroyed.)

In modern times, magicians that seriously worked at creating magical life forms were an endangered species. Of course, the lack of creators also meant there were very few magical life forms. There probably were not any outside of hygienic ceremonial grounds, temples, or towers.

Those life forms had functionality that did not exist in the natural world, so they often had various problems interacting with the natural world and died. It was perhaps similar to bringing a deep sea fish onto land.

“Why did you go out of your way to research that kind of thing…?” asked Kanzaki.

Slappar looked troubled and scratched at his check.

“To overcome a defect of mine.”

“?”

“It’s a congenital trait. I cannot construct spells above a certain level of complexity. It’s kind of hard to explain. I’m sorry this explanation is so vague, but I guess you could say my thoughts just come undone. When I try to think about something complex, I forget what that complex thing is. It’s a weird feeling.”

In other words, he had a condition that prevented him from using high level magic. However, that confused Kanzaki and the shop owner. He was the manager of Brick Wharf and he was in charge of using large scale interception magic to destroy any invaders coming by sea. They doubted something that important would be left to someone like that, but…

“That’s what Alfar is for.”

“You have her take care of your work?”

“Yes, but I think of her more as a DNA computer than a secretary. By preparing a device to leave the complex and troublesome calculations to, I can carry out the higher level work I wouldn’t be able to do on my own. So yeah, my field of research ended up being useful after all.”

“…So this calculation device you’re so proud of betrayed you?” asked the shop owner in shock.

If Slappar and Alfar came into conflict, Slappar would have no chance because he could not use high level magic.

It was the same as how the developer of a super computer would know everything about the computer but would not be able to defeat the computer in a simple calculation competition.

The tour guide girl raised her hand for some reason and then spoke.

“Umm, so why did Alfar get so mad at you?”

“I don’t know,” said Slappar with a shrug. “I thought I had supplied her with the bare minimum of safeties needed for a life form, but she may have gained a mentality that made her want something more. The only way to find out about that would be to ask Alfar herself.”

His words were calm but slightly cold.

From them, Kanzaki was able to imagine what the magician’s stance was.

“After all, she isn’t even human. It’s possible the desires that drive her actions are something unfathomable to us humans.”

Part 3

Kanzaki rechecked the distance and route to Brick Wharf which lay beyond the thicket.

“The spiritual items and other equipment used to create Alfar are still within Brick Wharf and Alfar has the intelligence needed to use them. …That means we need to put an end to this before a magical life form even more dangerous than Alfar is created.”

“I see. Are you saying you would personally rather avoid creating and killing a life form for such a selfish reason?”

“…”

Kanzaki looked displeased.

Then Slappar cut in.

“Oh, right. One more thing. It may be bad to just kill Alfar.”

“?”

“Currently, Alfar is magically linked with the core of Brick Wharf in order to bring the facility’s interception system under her control. It’s possible she has put together some kind of danger. …For example, she could have set it so the magical constructions within Brick Wharf will be destroyed and made unusable when her own life functions stop,” Slappar said in the same tone as someone giving a pointer on how to cook. “If you truly want to regain control of Brick Wharf as a strategic point in the northern defense line, you should do so without killing Alfar. Once she has been incapacitated, allow me to

check her over. As her creator, I will be able to immediately tell if she has applied any magical tricks to her physical body."

As an invader, that was an unfortunate requirement, but Kanzaki was actually relieved. She may have been glad to have a logical reason to not have to kill.

"Damn softhearted girl," the shop owner muttered under his breath before asking Kanzaki a question. "But how are you going to get close? Brick Wharf's large scale interception spell is intended to be pointed out toward the sea or the sky where there are no obstructions, so we managed to get this close by traveling from cover to cover. However, if you get any closer, it'll be able to detect you even behind cover and just blow you and the cover away. And we're still 3000 meters away. Even with your Saintly legs, you might get hit before reaching Brick Wharf."

"Brick Wharf's system is a spell disturbance type, right?"

"Eh? Is it? So it sends the magician's own magic out of control to cause damage from the inside? Well, I guess that would be the fastest way to take out a magician travelling by sea or air."

"Yes. And not using any magic and simply walking toward Brick Wharf will not work. A magician refines their life force into magic power. When that invisible bombardment of interception magic hits its target magician, it forcibly changes their life force into magic power and sends it out of control. It does not matter if the magician is using magic or not."

"You said it sends the magic out of control… When that happens, don't your blood vessels randomly burst, damage is done to your nerves, and other terrible things happen to you?"

The tour guide trembled as she imagined it.

The shop owner looked back over at Kanzaki.

"So how are you going to pull this one off? Are you just going to accept that you'll get damaged and strike a courageous bloody pose when you get there?"

"…Why do I have to do something manly like that?" Kanzaki sighed. "Whatever actual method it uses, a spell disturbance type attack will analyze what spells I specialize in and then send out the signal that will most effectively send my magic power out of control."

"And?"

"Basically, I just have to keep it from properly analyzing me in the first place."

Part 4

Kanzaki Kaori stood up from the short thicket.

She was just under 3000 meters from Brick Wharf. She stepped forward in that direction.

With the leg strength of a Saint, she could move faster than the speed of sound, but she did not rely on that speed. Instead, she slowly walked forward as if walking along a tightrope.

Of course, Brick Wharf's large scale interception spell immediately reacted.

The ultra-long range magic could accurately hit its enemy within a radius of 200 kilometers, so the giant invisible bombardment was accurately fired at Kanzaki Kaori.

It was a giant line of magic power with a diameter of over a meter.

That was the interception magic that could send any magician's magic power out of control to cause damage internally. Depending on the situation, it could even hold enough power to tear the magician's blood vessels and nerves to pieces.

But…

"Hey, Kanzaki!! That was a direct hit! Are you okay!?"

Kanzaki looked nonchalant as she responded to the shop owner's voice over her cell phone.

"Like I told you, this is no problem as long as I keep it from properly analyzing me."

It had directly hit her.

But Kanzaki's body was unscathed.

The reason was simple.

Brick Wharf's interception magic analyzed what magic the magician was using and used the signal that would most effectively send the magician's magic power out of control.

For Christian magic it used a Christian signal.

For Buddhist magic it used a Buddhist signal.

For Shinto magic it used a Shinto signal.

For each religion, it had a corresponding signal to use which would send the magic of the magician it struck out of control no matter what countermeasures were used.

That was how it *normally* worked.

However, the magic Kanzaki Kaori used was a bit different from normal Christian magic.

She used the magic of the Amakusa Church which was a fusion of Christian magic with other religions.

She used the spells of an organization that belonged to the Kakure Kirishitan who were persecuted during the Edo period in Japan. Due to their use of Shintoism and Buddhism as a front for their Christian church, they ended up constructing a unique style that fused those religions to the point of it being unclear what parts were camouflage and what parts were real.

Kanzaki could use Christian, Buddhist, and Shinto magic. Of course, that also meant she could use each separate type of magic power that was the source of their spells.

Brick Wharf would detect a Christian scent from Kanzaki and fire the corresponding interception magic. But in that time, Kanzaki would just switch her magic power to a Buddhist pattern. Even though the interception magic made for Christian magic struck Kanzaki, it did not do any damage.

After that, she just repeated the same pattern again and again.

When she could not use Christian magic, she used Buddhist magic, when she could not use Buddhist magic, she used Shinto magic, and when she could not use Shinto magic, she used Christian magic. By continually changing the pattern of her magic power, Kanzaki managed to neutralize the effects of Brick Wharf's attacks.

Because she did not think she could avoid getting hit by relying on her speed, Kanzaki focused on controlling what was going on within her body and continued to change her type of magic power as she slowly walked forward.

Even while being hit by the invisible bombardment again and again, Kanzaki's expression did not change.

The ineffectual attacks became a spray of magical power that scattered about around her.

After walking 3000 meters, Kanzaki reached Brick Wharf.

As its name suggested, Brick Wharf was a harbor with many buildings made of red bricks. The facility looked to be about 400 meters square. Large storage facilities and waiting areas for passengers lined the facility, but none of the large cranes and containers common in modern harbors were present.

(…Those facilities have not been used in a long time. It looks almost as if time has stopped.)

The buildings looked more like preserved cultural assets than old abandoned buildings. Someone had likely been maintaining them rather than just leaving them be. In fact, the entire facility seemed cleaner than one that was currently being used would be.

Once Kanzaki entered the facility, the bombardment from Brick Wharf stopped.

It may have had an automatic shutoff to prevent friendly fire or its user may have decided it was ineffective and was switching over to some other strategy.

Kanzaki brought her cell phone to her ear.

“I have made it inside. If I can destroy Brick Wharf’s interception equipment, you all can safely approach as well.”

“Ahh, no, don’t do that! That thing’s the core of the interception network preventing invaders from entering from the north. If you destroy it, the entire UK’s security grade will drop. How about you finish this with the least possible damage to the facility?”

“You say that, but you just want an excuse to stay there and not do anything, don’t you?”

“You’ve got that right. I’m not even suited for fighting in the first place. I just leave that kind of thing to you, our macho and muscular Saint.”

“…I object to being referred to as macho and muscular.”

“Then I’d like for our sexy and muscular Saint to do all sorts of things to me!!”

“I see. I’ll give you a good punch once this is all over, so prepare yourself.”

“Eeee!!”

Kanzaki ignored the shop owner’s trembling shriek and approached a nearby building.

The facilities of Brick Wharf were not separated into individual buildings such as storage areas, waiting areas, or a lighthouse. Instead, all of the facilities were connected in one continuous brick structure. That fusion of multiple buildings made it look like a giant castle or a chaotically expanded downtown.

The door Kanzaki approached seemed to belong to a temporary lodging area for the crew of ships. The metal door was unlocked, but a single charm was placed connecting the door to the wall. It was made so opening the door would rip the charm.

(…That certainly is blatant.)

Kanzaki sighed.

(That probably means it's a fake.)

She checked around the door and found a small symbol drawn in marker on the back of the protruding portion of the doorknob. The symbol itself held no meaning, but when the knob was turned, it would match up with a different symbol on the center column of the knob creating a rune.

"…"

Kanzaki pulled a marker of the same color out of her pocket.

Just because she had found a trap was no reason to destroy it. Her opponent would detect that just like how gray static would inform security guards of a destroyed security camera.

Instead of destroying the rune trap, Kanzaki added an extra rune with her marker in order to prevent it from functioning properly. Even if she turned the knob, the alarm would not sound, but it would continue to send out the signal saying it was functioning properly.

"That should do it."

After finishing her modification of the rune, Kanzaki turned the doorknob and entered.

The inside was quite spacious.

Perhaps because it had been built with a focus on the practical, the interior was made of rather cheap-looking stone. Something like a reception counter was located at the front and a map of the facility was displayed on the wall.

It was basically being used as it was during the Industrial Revolution, but some portions had clearly been remodeled. For example, it had electric lights and the map directly labeled things such as the Interception Magic Control Room and Magical Life Form Modification Room.

(I guess they saw no reason to hide anything since the facility has been made so normal people cannot get in.)

However, Kanzaki was not about to trust those labels.

In order to check where each and every room was, she looked left and right down the hallway stretching from the counter.

Kanzaki grabbed her cell phone.

“How well can Alfar adapt to her environment? Does she have the immunity needed to live one her own if she left the facility?”

“I’ve never tried it, so I don’t know. There was never any real reason to take her outside,” readily replied Slappar.

Kanzaki frowned.

“Do you really not understand her thought patterns? Didn’t you create her?”

“Well…” Slappar said trailing off.

He may have been simulating it within his own head.

“Imagine a kitten that had never left the house ever since it was born. What do you think it would do if you opened up the front door before its eyes? Would its wild instincts make it curious or would its domesticated reason and experience make it afraid?”

“…”

“You can’t make a general answer to that, can you? All you can say is that it depends on the individual kitten. We’re talking about a life form that has a will and mind of its own. It is not so easily analyzed.”

“…You certainly didn’t see it coming when Alfar betrayed you,” pointed out the jeans shop owner.

Slappar gave no real response to that comment. He just continued speaking in the same tone of voice.

“However, I’m sure Alfar will protect that place with her life.”

“? Is that because this is her birthplace?”

“The reason isn’t so emotional. Simply put, Brick Wharf is the greatest collection of usable power for Alfar. Leaving will not gain her anything. She will do everything she can to defend that facility unless she truly intends to die.” Slappar said and continues speaking as casually as if he was making an additional order at a restaurant. “As I said before, it is possible Alfar is magically linked to Brick Wharf’s interception device so that the system will be destroyed if she dies. Defeat Alfar without killing her and then let me check her over.”

“Hmm…”

Why had Alfar taken over Brick Wharf in the first place?

She had to have had a reason to drive Slappar from Brick Wharf and take over the facility. Kanzaki had to look into what that reason was and possibly put a stop to it depending on what it was.

Just as she was thinking that…

“Who are you?” said a voice.

It sounded like the voice of a girl in her early teens.

Kanzaki frantically spun around. The voice had come from down the long passageway that was wrapped in darkness. However, Kanzaki was confused. Her eyesight was 8.0 in both eyes and she had a certain level of night vision ability. She was looking deep, deep into the passageway and yet she could see no sign of the person who should have been standing there.

She then heard the question once more.

“Who are you?”

Kanzaki narrowed her eyes once more.

She could see something like threads laid out through the darkness. Unlike the steel wires Kanzaki used in battle, these threads were very thin and made of something like silk.

“…Is that supposed to be a Tarnkappe?”

Originally, it would have been a large cloak. The wearer’s strength would be enhanced and their body would be made invisible. The person who had spoken must have analyzed and reconstructed its workings to turn it into a spiritual item in the form of narrow threads. Most likely, the threads laid out in the passageway created a magical screen like the film of a soap bubble and the person’s form was erased from the background.

The person reacted to Kanzaki’s words.

The person must have moved out from within the ring of strings because a human form suddenly appeared out of thin air.

It was a short girl.

She had long blonde hair and white skin. Her defining characteristic was her oddly long and narrow ears. Her clothes seemed to be made of cotton. Each small button on them was carved out of wood and there was not a single metal part.

She had a relatively well-featured face, but something felt incredibly off to Kanzaki.

She was not sure what caused her to feel that way.

The girl's face was the same as a human's and her bodily structure was the same as a human's. She had two arms and two legs and five fingers or toes at the end of each. All of those things were completely normal, but they somehow seemed incredibly unnatural.

Kanzaki spoke the impression that came to her mind.

"…Alfar…?"

Kanzaki was a little shocked that the person who had taken over Brick Wharf was a small girl, but she was not human. That girl was an existence created by Slappar. Her apparent age meant nothing.

"Who are you?" repeated the short blonde girl once more without denying Kanzaki's identification of her. "Not many people would be able to enter this place."

"I am from Necessarius."

Alfar took a step back.

"I assume you are here to return Brick Wharf's defenses to normal, but I urge you not to. If you approach any further, great misfortune will befall you."

Her words did not appear to have any hostility behind them.

However, that very lack of hostility made Kanzaki raise her guard further.

(Is this just how she is or did Slappar set her to be like this? She seems to be able to speak like a human, but…does she just have no hostility or can I not detect it because the process through which she feels emotions is too different from a human's?)

"If this can be resolved through discussion, I have no need to draw my sword."

"Words are not enough. I doubt you would be able to envision it properly." Alfar silently narrowed her eyes. "Leave."

That made Kanzaki even more uneasy because she could not grasp the girl's emotions.

"I have taken control of this facility. There is nowhere for that man to return to and I do not intend to invite in anyone else. Anyone who tries to get in my way will have great misfortune befall them."

"…Do you really think telling me that will be enough to make me leave? This is our facility. Brick Wharf's interception magic is directly connected to the strength of the country's security. If we do not regain control of the facility, dangerous elements will be invited in from other countries. I must prevent that from happening."

"So you will come despite knowing it will bring you misfortune?"

"Sorry, but I have much more confidence than I would like when it comes to my good luck."

"I see."

This time, Alfar pointed her small palm toward Kanzaki with some clear intention.

"But I will not let any misfortune occur."

Something jumped out.

It was a creature.

If you put a crocodile head on a giant dog's body, you would have something similar to that creature.

(A magical life form!?)

While Alfar was a few dozen meters down the passageway, the crocodile-headed dog suddenly appeared from thin air only about 3 meters away and leapt straight for Kanzaki's windpipe.

That affected her timing which brought the level of danger up by quite a bit.

"A connection with the Tarnkappe!?"

Alfar had used the spiritual item that eliminated a specific object from sight in order to hide the crocodile-headed dog.

A normal person would have had their throat ripped out in that one attack. Some expert acrobats could avoid a crossbow bolt aimed for their head, but even someone like that would have been killed. This was because the crocodile-headed dog was a ferocious life form. It did not head solely in a straight line like a crossbow bolt. It moved at high speed and made minor adjustments to match the movements of its target.

A surprise attack, speed, and adjustments.

With those three elements together, it would have been odd if Kanzaki did not have her throat ripped out.

However, Kanzaki Kaori was a Saint who could fight at speeds greater than the speed of sound.

With a roar, wind blew about.

Kanzaki did not evade. She had rationally decided to attack and bring down the creature instead.

And…

(…A life form.)

Kanzaki's hand reaching for her sword hesitated and she had enough time to change to an attack using the scabbard.

A dry sound rang out. She had swung the long scabbard around horizontally and slammed it horizontally into the crocodile-headed dog's mouth. It acted similarly to the bit held in the mouth of a racehorse. The crocodile-headed dog instinctually closed its mouth on the scabbard and Kanzaki swung it upward.

She swung the scabbard in a half circle.

The scabbard forcefully flew to the floor slamming the crocodile-headed dog's back into the floor. The action was similar to a judo throw.

A great sound that was mostly a shockwave exploded out and strength left the crocodile-headed dog. The scabbard slipped from its mouth.

"…"

Kanzaki looked away from the crocodile-headed dog on the floor and back toward Alfar.

At some point, she had disappeared.

Kanzaki narrowed her eyes and the no longer necessary silk threads floated down to the ground.

Part 5

She had lost sight of Alfar.

As Kanzaki attempted to track her down while remaining on the lookout for traps, she suddenly heard a noise from within one of the rooms lining the passageway.

She opened the door and found a large room.

Kanzaki frowned.

"…Is this a magical life form plant?"

Each individual device was a spherical glass container about 1 meter across. It was unclear how anything was put inside, but they were filled about a third of the way with dirt and the remaining space was filled with plants. The spherical glass containers had various different environments inside. One was like a forest, one was like a desert, one was like an icy continent, and one was like the depths of the ocean.

As Kanzaki looked over at the 20 or 30 glass spheres, Slappar spoke over her cell phone.

"The devices there are set to emulate the natural environment you want the life form to be born in. You artificially create a few unclassified phenomena you think will create the life form in the design you wish for."

"So it starts with amino acids?"

"You could do that, but then you'd have to wait billions of years before your magical life form was complete."

"I see," Kanzaki muttered.

She then tapped on a nearby glass container with the back of her hand.

"So the three-headed cat and the deep sea poisonous snake in these containers are part of your collection?"

Kanzaki could tell that her tone of voice was naturally stiffening.

Most of the magical life forms in there likely had fangs and claws much more dangerous than any in the natural world. However, that was all they had. Most likely, a normal cat or dog would be stronger. The magical life forms were twisted and therefore would likely easily be killed by a problem that anything in the natural world would not find an issue at all.

But then Slappar, the man who had been doing research on that kind of thing, gave a response different from what Kanzaki had expected.

"…I don't recognize those. As I told you, my objective was to get something that could perform my calculations for me. I had no interest in any life form other than Alfar, so I kept my focus away from just adding things onto animals."

"So these were newly created by Alfar to increase her strength?"

“I don’t know. It would be faster to just ask Alfar. …But that’s a problem if true. Those devices are not meant to be used like that.”

In any case, if Alfar continued creating magical life forms, misfortune would befall the purposefully twisted monsters as well. Kanzaki had to quickly deal with Alfar.

Kanzaki left the magical life form plant, returned to the passageway, and readjusted her grip on the cell phone.

“Alfar saw me and chose to quickly flee. It is possible she has left Brick Wharf, but…”

“What would fleeing get her?” responded the jeans shop owner. “Alfar’s current main weapons are Brick Wharf’s interception magic and the magical life forms. If she loses those, she’ll be defenseless. If she was truly going to flee, wouldn’t she at least have increased her strength first by taking those magical life forms you saw with her?”

“So that means…”

“If she hasn’t made preparations to skip town, maybe she’s hiding somewhere in Brick Wharf waiting to get in a surprise attack.” The shop owner’s voice then lowered in tone. “(…But this really is an oddly structured incident. We don’t even know why Alfar drove her own creator out and holed up inside. The problem of the level of national security dropping due to Brick Wharf being occupied only affects us. I can’t see why Alfar would want to do this.)”

“It’s possible Alfar wasn’t able to calmly come up with a plan,” suggested Kanzaki.

“Why not?”

“Well…” Kanzaki trailed off for a second. “I don’t want to think this, but she might have driven Slappar out after receiving inhuman treatment from him.”

“I don’t know.” Kanzaki had felt a little guilty for even suggesting it, but the shop owner sounded skeptical. “If he was planning to do that kind of thing to Alfar when he created her, don’t you think he would have added in a little insurance when he was creating her? He would just have to set her mentality so she was unable to feel hatred toward her master.”

“I suppose, but…”

“…The reason we can’t tell what the enemy is after might be because the enemy is Alfar. Her reasons may be something we just can’t understand as humans.”

“?”

“What, are you the type of person that loves dressing cats or dogs up in clothes? Only the humans enjoy that kind of thing. The pets are certainly not enjoying it,” the shop owner said sounding annoyed. “Pet lovers always say they have a strong emotional connection with their pet or that their pet loves them, but that isn’t true. The pets are just running on a predatory program that leads them to the safest and most efficient means of getting food. Otherwise, abandoned dogs would not become so attached to their new owners. In Japan, there’s a story about a dog named Hachiko, but that can be explained by the dog’s predatory program not correctly recognizing that its owner was dead. …There is a gap between humans and other creatures. Personally though, I wish it really was that the dog was just continuing to hope that his owner was eventually going to come back.”

Kanzaki frowned.

“So you’re saying even if Alfar does have a logical and simple reason for her actions, we cannot understand or recognize it as humans?”

“If we don’t know what the enemy is after, it raises the danger of the enemy tripping us up. You might need to think more about the possibility of a trap.”

After hearing that, Kanzaki leaned against the wall of the passageway and thought for a bit.

The shop owner had a point.

A human like her trying to guess how Alfar’s mind worked could be similar to a pet lover forcing their dog to wear clothes.

But…

(…Is all this really so complicated?)

All of Alfar’s strength was held within Brick Wharf.

Fleeing from the facility would mean she would lose all of her strength and be easily captured.

That meant Alfar was stuck.

Now that Kanzaki Kaori, one of the world’s fewer than 20 Saints, was inside the facility, she was cornered.

Given that, Alfar’s initial rebellion against Slappar did not seem logical. It had done nothing but lead her to that predicament.

That was how it looked at first glance.

But Kanzaki thought about a different, more human-like motive.

(If Alfar was being treated unreasonably, she may have wanted to escape from that situation. However, she could not escape on her own, so she might have taken over Brick Wharf so that she could get help from a foreign magic group. If I just think about this in an exceedingly human way, that is a definite possibility, but…)

Kanzaki was conflicted whether she should mention that possibility to the shop owner, but then she noticed something.

The cell phone in her hand had gone completely silent.

It was not just an issue with the electromagnetic signal. She had not actually been using the cell phone to speak to the others. A sticker-shaped charm stuck to the back of the phone had transmitted the voices using small vibrations.

That spell had been cut off.

And it had been done so secretly Kanzaki had not even noticed at first despite being the user of the spell.

(This is…!?)

She gathered a slight bit of power in her brow and the surrounding air seemed to freeze over.

No, it did not just *seem* to freeze over.

The wall Kanzaki was leaning against turned faintly white. A circle with a radius of about a meter had turned white. She felt cold. It was actually an exceedingly fine…

(…Mist…?)

Just after that thought came to mind, she denied it. The following three things almost reflexively floated to the top of her mind:

A magical life form from Norse mythology.

Magic using text carved in stone.

Crystal.

Straight divisions.

But Kanzaki Kaori was an instant too slow in arriving at the correct answer.

Immediately afterwards, something activated and Kanzaki's body was swallowed up by an explosive blast.

Part 6

While hiding in the thicket a distance from Brick Wharf, the jeans shop owner lightly shook his cell phone.

(…It cut out?)

He frowned and thought of two possibilities.

The first was that someone had destroyed the spell Kanzaki had constructed.

The second was that Brick Wharf's defensive walls had been strengthened obstructing the signal from inside.

Either way, something was wrong. The shop owner stuck just his head out of the thicket and looked toward Brick Wharf. It was about 3000 meters away.

The tour guide girl then seemed to notice that the shop owner was acting oddly.

"(…Wait, what are you doing? If you stick out any further Brick Wharf's interception magic will fire on you!)"

"(…It looks like this situation has gotten to be a real pain in the ass, so I'll be heading to Brick Wharf.)"

"(…You definitely can't do that!! You can't avoid it like Kanzaki, right? How many times do you think you'll get hit before you make it 3000 mete—ah, wait! Why did you just steal my report!?)"

The shop owner ignored the frantic tour guide and started flipping through some parchments.

"(…So it can lock onto 50 targets at a time and it can attack 20 of those in an instant. In that case, I might be able to trick it by firing some dummy spiritual items. How many Man Eagle shirts do I have with me?)"

While muttering to himself, the shop owner rummaged through his bag. He pulled out a strange shirt with flint covering the lining and then noticed someone's presence.

Slappar, the magician who had created Alfar, was staring at him.

The man may have wanted to help, but the shop owner was not going to take him up on the offer if so. He relied on Alfar because he could not use combat magic and then Alfar had betrayed him. It may not have been fair, but the shop owner could not get rid of his poor impression of the man.

He then heard a whistling noise.

It sounded like a cold winter wind entering through a gap in a poorly built door. The shop owner realized it was coming from Slappar's mouth and…

"That breathing technique…why are you refining your life force into magic power…!?"

"When I heard a Saint was coming, I thought this would all be resolved much more easily."

The shop owner tried to bring up his guard, but it was too late.

Slappar held out his palm and a strange white mist covered his fingertips.

"It looks like this situation has gotten to be a real pain in the ass, so I think I'll be heading to Brick Wharf. …And the thing I ordered from an unrelated normal person seems to have finally arrived."

A large object was approaching Slappar as he grinned.

It was a tanker truck.

Part 7

The passageway within Brick Wharf was covered in crimson flames.

Even the places the flames did not reach directly were assaulted by a thick wall of heat. A blonde girl with oddly long ears stood completely still amid that air that would destroy one's organs just by breathing it in.

She was Alfar.

"I do not care where you go or what you do," the small girl said ignoring the hot blast.

The reason she did not even think of the possibility of taking damage may have been because she was constructed differently from a normal living creature.

“But it was a mistake to come into contact with those within the second factory. You would have been better off if you had realized that I can feel wrath just like humans.”

Black smoke struck the stone ceiling and slowly spread out.

Alfar looked around the area and gave a small command under her breath. The sound of a ventilation fan blowing suddenly became audible and the harmful smoke was quickly sucked away.

“Hmph.”

In order to check on the body, Alfar started to get rid of the magical flames she had created, but her slender fingertips suddenly froze.

With a roar, the sea of flames that had taken over the area were blown out in an instant.

Kanzaki Kaori stood there just as she had before the surprise attack. Not even a single one of her hairs was singed. However, multiple wires were strung up around her. Similar to a string figure, the crossing lines of the wires created a three dimensional magic circle which had prevented the flames and heat from entering.

“So that was rune magic.”

Alfar looked surprised and Kanzaki pointed toward the wall next to her with the wires still spread out.

A large number of water drops were on the wall.

That was the area that had been covered in white frozen mist before.

“Just like other crystals, ice crystals have a lot of straight line divisions. Snow is also crystallized water and I have heard that it can have so many different designs because of the effects of dust in the air.”

The two of them faced off at a distance of about 30 meters.

Alfar remained silent and Kanzaki continued speaking.

“By scattering the fine particles making up the dust and spraying supercooled water over it, you can briefly create ice crystals in the shape you want. …Runes would be the most compatible with that as they can be constructed with only straight lines. If all you need are straight lines, you can create it with just ice crystals.”

In rune magic, the type of rune changed the type of magic being fired. That also meant one’s enemy could figure out what magic was coming next if they could read the runes. By creating the runes out of microscopic ice crystals, there was no danger of them being read with the naked eye without some kind of special measures being taken beforehand.

Also, that method allowed many runes to be scattered at once which increased the power of the attack.

That method was killing two birds with one stone.

Kanzaki had quickly noticed something was wrong due to the environment and the season, but that method could be set up like a landmine if used outside during the winter.

But…

“Using ice as a material is a double-edged sword,” Kanzaki said with her voice as sharp as ice. “Rune magic loses its effectiveness once the runes have been destroyed. If they are deeply carved into wood or stone, that’s one thing, but fragile and short-lived ice is easily destroyed. For example, your carefully calculated runes can be melted into mere water droplets by pressing your palm against them.”

“…You actually used friction, didn’t you? Snow and mist will strike something, melt, and then bind together in a different form. You used your wires to create a large amount of frictional heat and melted the surface so my precise runes would reform into a different design.”

“It was mostly random. It was not enough to completely eliminate the flames.”

On a real battlefield, good luck did not mean anything on its own. However, when it was supported by great strength, good luck could be nightmarishly effective when used as the final push.

Alfar frowned at Kanzaki’s strength that was so deeply carved with her awareness of her own uncertain “good luck”. The small girl then tried to fall back.

Kanzaki pursued her.

She pursued her with words rather than a simple blade.

“Are you that upset that I saw those magical life forms because you created them?”

Alfar froze.

Kanzaki unhesitatingly continued speaking.

“Even though they were created in a twisted manner, do you love them as your own children? Or do you feel guilty that you created them solely to supplement your own strength? Can you answer me that?”

"…"

The air around Alfar seemed to burn.

This time, she had not caused some magical change to occur. Alfar's emotions were simply so strong that they gave that illusion.

"I did not create them," Alfar said while barely moving her lips. "The plants and animals around me merely became twisted on their own."

"What…?"

Kanzaki frowned and Alfar raised her slender, white hand.

Her completely normal hand.

However, it was different from a normal life form due to what it was made from.

"The workings of the bodies of all plants and animals in this world change to match their environment. Some change to protect themselves from a natural enemy. Some change to more efficiently capture their prey. Some change to resist the heat or the cold. Some change to resist tremendous water pressure or to breathe sulfur in a place with no oxygen. …There are many different examples, but no plant or animal evolves all on its own. Functionality is added or refined based on the environment that surrounds it." Alfar pressed her small palm against her chest. "So what if an 'environment' that does not exist on the earth was to come into contact with these plants and animals?"

Kanzaki thought her breathing would stop.

She understood what Alfar was trying to say.

"The path of evolution greatly changes. In response to me, an 'environment' that does not exist on the earth, the forms of completely normal plants and animals become rapidly twisted. Insects see me as a natural enemy and try to defend themselves and plants determine that I might be able to take their seeds far away. The intention and method are different in each case, but it is clear that the design of plants and animals changes just from my being near them."

"Then…"

Kanzaki swallowed.

Even a veteran warrior like her could tell that her throat was going dry due to tension.

"The creatures in the glass containers in what you called the second factory are…?"

“They are plants and animals that were inside Brick Wharf. A cat named Bailey, a wild snake, and insects began to become twisted, so I put them within the containers. I do not know how distorted they would have become if I had not done so. At any rate, this is a part of my nature. What occurs is more of a sudden change due to extreme conditions than the usually slow changes of evolution, so their designs change in no time at all.” Alfar shook her head. “And it does not end there. The plants and animals that change due to me have begun to cause other plants and animals to distort in the same way. If that spreads beyond a certain point, no one will be able to stop it. All plants and animals in the world will be forcibly twisted and no creatures will retain their original form.”

All living things had changed over a long period of time according to natural selection in order to deal with the various areas of the world.

Alfar’s forced evolution ignored that kind of thing, so it would destroy the optimized balance that had been created within earth’s environment. That meant they could be turned into creatures to which earth’s environment was like a deadly poison.

“I took control of Brick Wharf in order to determine if the evolution would stabilize so that the creatures would no longer change past a certain point even while being near me for long periods of time. Currently, the only result is some that do not cause forced evolution in a secondary or tertiary plant or animal. However, those convenient ones are not even 1% of the whole. In most of them, the evolution continues without end.”

As Alfar spoke, she looked at Kanzaki with pitying eyes.

“And humans are no exception when it comes to these changes.”

Part 8

Alfar had been born within one of the spherical glass containers inside Brick Wharf.

Slappar had color coded the map of Brick Wharf to show what areas Alfar could go in and what areas she could not. Alfar and Slappar could not stay in the same room and they had to speak through thick glass.

There had been a good reason for that.

She had not been particularly dissatisfied with her birth or living environment. Slappar, her creator, had occasionally spoken of the wide world outside, but Alfar had been satisfied with just what was within her reach.

But then there had been a change.

It had started with a creature known as a cat. It had been a very curious creature of a breed known as a ragdoll. He seemed to have been a pet. He was named Bailey and had remained on the other side of the thick glass just like Slappar so Alfar could not touch him.

Slappar had given a rare troubled expression when she had said she wanted to touch the cat.

A few days later, Slappar had given her a stuffed animal.

It was a stuffed cat that looked a lot like Bailey. Its long fluffy fur was of such high quality that she had wondered if a real cat felt the same way. Also, the stuffed cat moved like Bailey. It seemed to have a moving framework inside beneath the cotton.

But it was not Bailey.

As she had walked through the color coded area of Brick Wharf, she had suddenly started to wonder if she would be able to meet Bailey if she were to leave that designated area. She wondered if she would get to meet all sorts of large creatures like Bailey.

If Alfar had been a mere spiritual item, she would never have thought about leaving the color coded area.

But she was a magical life form. She was a living creature.

Due to that, Alfar made a decision of her own free will and took the first step.

She did however remain within Brick Wharf.

She did not leave the building and head out into the vast world outside.

She merely headed to a different room in the same facility.

She just wanted to meet Bailey the cat and see if he felt as nice as or even nicer than the stuffed cat.

And yet…

Alfar had come across some strange creatures.

A giant centipede with human fingers in place of its legs had been crawling along the wall.

A mass of flesh with eyeballs crammed around it like grapes had been squirming on the ground.

A four-legged creature with a head in front, back, left, and right, with legs stocking out in ridiculous directions, and that could barely support its own weight had been there.

She had guessed that she would find all sorts of creatures outside.

But those grotesque colors had not been what she had expected. They were completely different from Bailey the cat. It may have been unfair to creatures that were born that way, but Alfar had thought of them as monsters.

Scared, Alfar had run away.

The color coded map disappeared from her head. She had no idea if she was running through somewhere she should be or not.

Alfar had been found trembling in a corner of a small room by Bailey the ragdoll cat. The cat had looked at Alfar with its large blue eyes and tilted its head to the side slightly. It had looked as if it were asking what was wrong.

When she had first hesitantly touched Bailey, he had felt so warm tears flowed from her eyes.

But…

That comfort had not lasted long.

In reality, it may have lasted for hours.

But then something had changed.

Bailey's breathing had become erratic. The height of his left and right eyes had wavered. When she had realized the shape of his face was beginning to crumble, Alfar had once again been assaulted by fear. It had reminded her of the monstrous creatures she had seen before. She had wondered if Bailey was just another one of those monsters in disguise.

But that was not it.

Even as his face and body were collapsing, Bailey had continued to stare at Alfar with his large blue eyes. The cat had seemed to be asking her what was wrong with its head cocked to the side. He had seemed to be reading Alfar's emotions and trying to comfort her.

Those actions had clearly been Bailey's.

Bailey had been turning into something else. Alfar had wondered why. She had thought and thought and thought…and then she had been struck with a possibility.

Alfar had recalled that Slappar had told her not to leave the color coded area.

What if that had been because doing so would cause that to happen?

Is this happening to everyone because of me?

Will even my creator Slappar become like this if nothing is done?

Alfar had then screamed.

She had grabbed Bailey in both arms as he continued to change by the instant and she had walked through the facility. She had wanted to run, but with the great turmoil in her head, walking was all she could manage. Alfar had headed for the room she had been born in. She had put Bailey inside one of the spherical glass containers in that room and had finally collapsed to the floor once she had seen that the changes had at least temporarily stopped. Bailey had already grown two extra heads.

Alfar had then read a report left in the same room.

From it, she had learned of her special characteristics and what Slappar had created her for.

She had had enough.

She had not wanted to turn even one more living thing into a monster.

That was why she had distanced herself from all living things.

She had wanted to die, but that would not have been enough. Alfar unconditionally caused changes in all living things around her. The report had said that characteristic would remain to a certain extent even in her corpse.

Apparently, Alfar had been magically reconstructed from the fossil of some kind of animal. That meant she would not be completely harmless even as a corpse of flesh and bone. Unless she was completely returned to being a fossil, any animal that came into contact with her would be changed.

In that case, there was only one thing she could do.

Luckily, it seemed the outer walls of Brick Wharf blocked this characteristic of Alfar's to a certain extent. That was why she had first had to get all living things away from the building. Then, she had started searching for a way to completely return her corpse to a fossil. She had thought she could just leave her corpse and let it decompose, but apparently the decomposition of a body required the help of a different life form. Also, bones and fossils were different things. Her bones would still cause the irregular changes to occur, so that method would not work. She had to find a different method.

In truth, Alfar had been afraid.

She had been so afraid she had not known what to do.

But Bailey had continued to look at her with his blue eyes from within the spherical glass container.

His eyes had seemed to be asking her what was wrong.

Most likely, Bailey would never return to being a normal ragdoll now that he had three heads. It was not the same as an injury or a disease. Once something evolved to a new species on a genetic level, no one could conveniently "devolve" it to a previous point.

Alfar had determined that she would never again bring Bailey's fate to another living thing.

Part 9

Kanzaki recalled the cat with extra heads she had seen in one of the spherical glass containers and almost shuddered.

The issue was not whether Alfar had good intentions or not.

The danger currently drawing near Kanzaki had gone beyond the level where that applied.

Without thinking, Kanzaki took a step backwards as Alfar looked at her with calm eyes.

"I believe it took Bailey the cat three or four hours before he started to change. I will not stop you if you flee, but if you do not want to be put in one of those containers, you should leave soon."

Alfar's objective was now clear.

She simply did not want the plants and animals around her to become twisted.

For that reason, she had driven out her master Slappar and then had not left Brick Wharf herself.

But…

“Evolution is normally a very long process that takes tens of thousands of years,” said Kanzaki as she stepped back further. “Even if you supply a special ‘environment’, I do not think a living thing’s appearance and functioning would change that greatly in just half a day.”

“Well…”

Alfar trailed off.

However, the answer came from somewhere else without Kanzaki having to press the magical life form for it.

“Isn’t that obvious? It’s because she was made that way from the beginning.”

A white mist spread around.

It covered a much wider range than the one Alfar had created.

And a large amount of powerful acid headed for Kanzaki.

The great amount of liquid ignored the straight passageway and headed straight through the wall to the side seeming to melt it. There was enough of it that Kanzaki would drown…or even be crushed by it even if it was only water.

But…

With an explosive noise, the literally tons of acid split apart on its own before striking Kanzaki.

“Wah hah. Wow. The method was different from Moses’s parting of the sea, but you still must have read my rune in time. Uruz was originally the remains left over after smelting iron. I then added on the meaning of a powerful acid to the concept of melting iron, but maybe you used those steel wires or something to lead it.”

Hearing that voice, Kanzaki quickly moved away from the melted wall.

Someone stepped in through the wall he had melted. He must have had some kind of protection against it because he ignored the puddles of acid on the floor around the melted wall. Kanzaki could hear his wet footsteps.

Alfar’s expression changed.

However, that was not too surprising.

The intruder was her creator, Slappar.

“…”

Kanzaki looked over at Slappar once more.

He should have been with the jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl. If he had taken any suspicious actions on his own, the other two would have at least tried to stop him, but…

Slappar must have sensed something from Kanzaki silence because he lightly shook his index finger.

“I didn’t kill them.”

“…”

Kanzaki’s eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

The magician’s words continued.

“But that isn’t because I was feeling merciful. It seems that man has good judgment. I attacked at close range, but I was not able to get in a fatal wound. I’m rather surprised to be honest.”

On the surface, those were words of praise, but there was clear scorn in his tone.

Kanzaki slowly moved her lips and asked a question.

“Why did you go to that much effort to get here?”

“Y’know, I was planning to get in your way at some point, but the timing never really worked out. But at least you followed my instructions and didn’t kill Alfar. It’s unclear whether another one of her could be created with the same effects even following the exact same plans. Basically, I can’t just make a new one if I lose her.”

The original master of Brick Wharf was much more at home there than Alfar.

“Even if there was an abnormal ‘deep forest’ ecosystem where a natural Alfar would live, it would not have this special ability to cause forced evolution in other animals over just a couple of hours. If it did, all life forms on earth would have been changed. That major difference from other living things only showed itself as a result of my design. However, I do not know exactly what I did to make it show itself. You must rely on luck a bit when trying to create such a convenient life form.”

Before, Slappar had warned that Alfar might be linked to Brick Wharf’s interception system so her death would destroy the system. However, that may have been nothing more than a bluff.

A bluff to prevent Alfar from being destroyed by a Saint.

“You said you cannot use magic that is too complex…”

“Yes, that’s why I made this simple. I only use one type of rune. I just created a lot of them with supercooled water and fine particles and then cover for the inferiority of my magic with overwhelming numbers. They may not have much of an effect, but what other magician uses over 10,000 runes at once? Normally, you would build a temple instead of wasting that many.”

Alfar seemed to be carefully observing Slappar, but the magician did not even turn in her direction. He most likely understood the differences in their abilities. He then began speaking again in a joking manner.

“It would have been simple to just kill her to stop her, but she was simply too valuable. As I said, I would not necessarily get the same thing if I made another following the same plans. Meanwhile, she had messed with Brick Wharf’s interception magic, so I had no choice but to report it to Necessarius. So I could spread false information at the same time, I ‘fled’ from Brick Wharf and met up with you.”

“…”

Kanzaki glared back at Slappar.

That meant his goal in creating Alfar was not just as something to help with his magical calculations.

“I don’t have any grand aspirations or anything. I don’t intend to distort all living things in the world and I don’t intend to take over the world with an army of battle chimeras. Those things just sound like a pain in the ass. My goal is quite simple,” the magician said sounding bored. “I want to evolve.”

His words would have sounded vague if Alfar had not been there.

“As I told you before, I cannot construct magic with complexity above a certain level. No matter what methods are used or how much work is put into developing a cure, nothing can be done about that. That is why I started working on Alfar. If my very base as a living being is changed, I might be able to overcome my weakness.”

“…Even if you lose your humanity and destroy the balance of living things as a result?”

“Of course.”

“Even though this does not just affect the present but affects the ecosystem for hundreds if not thousands of years to come?”

“Why even think about that?”

Hearing that response, Kanzaki naturally reached for the handle of her sword.

At that distance, she only needed an instant.

The puddles of acid on the floor around him were the main issue, but as a Saint, she could jump about 20 meters if she wanted to. It was perfectly possibly for her to attack him while practically flying.

“Excellent.”

However, Slappar’s expression did not change.

And he was most likely well aware what a Saint was.

“But I should warn you that it is useless. Do you really think I would attack without making any preparations?”

As he spoke, the magician pointed toward the melted wall.

Kanzaki could not see from her position.

With a movement of her fingertips, she used her wires to slice a rectangular hole in the passageway wall and finally realized what Slappar was talking about.

White mist was spreading across the area.

As if snow had fallen and accumulated within Brick Wharf’s grounds, the ground, the building walls, and the ceilings had changed color slightly. Most likely, all of it contained the artificially created microscopic runes. They had to number in the millions, billions…no possibly even trillions. She could not even imagine how many runes there had to be in all.

“I had to call in a tanker truck used to carry liquid oxygen in order to prepare enough supercooled water. Even then, it took a lot of effort to disseminate it across such a large facility.”

Each individual one was exceedingly weak and had no more strength than a push of a finger.

But when they numbered in the thousands, millions, billions, or trillions, they could hold a great power. Even a Saint like Kanzaki who had overwhelming power on her own could easily be worn down by numbers that great.

She sensed danger in the situation before her and had the following thought at the same time.

(He can produce this much power even with his inability to construct complex magic. Just how powerful a magician would he be if he truly managed to use Alfar to overcome that weakness?)

After going that far for his goal, it seemed unlikely Slappar would stop after obtaining his first goal of evolution. Once he accomplished one goal, he would move on to the next. Once he accomplished that next one, he would move on to yet another. If the damages would expand seemingly infinitely in the process, Kanzaki truly had to stop that magician.

Kanzaki glanced over at Alfar.

That magical life form had once rebelled against her creator in order to protect him. She had been acting in order to protect Slappar. If that magician gave her an order, it was highly likely she would become an enemy too, but…

“Saint, while I am free, let me say one thing,” Alfar said while looking Kanzaki straight in the eye. “The way to stop him is very simple: kill.”

The magician’s mouth reflexively formed a smile upon hearing the girl’s beautiful voice. It may have been because the words were coming from the magical life form he had worked so hard to create.

That magician only used Alfar as a tool.

However, Alfar may have wanted to only be used as a tool.

Kanzaki said nothing.

While saying nothing, she clearly gripped her sword.

However, Slappar’s body relaxed. He was of course still on guard, but he was confident that he would not be easily defeated. He felt he could counter any attack coming his way and then take Kanzaki out.

And…

The dull sound of something being sliced exploded out within Brick Wharf.

Part 10

A distance of 20 meters lay between Kanzaki Kaori and Slappar.

However, that did not matter.

Instead of wielding her sword, she manipulated the wires in her hand in order to hide what she was doing. The seven almost invisibly thin and sharp wires followed the motions of Kanzaki’s fingertips and accurately attacked her target.

A light scrape ran along Slappar's cheek.

A few drops of blood spilled out, but his expression did not change.

However, Kanzaki's target had not been Slappar.

It had been the Alfar girl who stood behind him.

"…"

The Alfar girl looked down at her body. A large wound ran diagonally along her upper body. An instant later, a great amount of blood burst out and she limply collapsed to the ground.

"She told me," Kanzaki said with a calm expression and a coldhearted voice, "that all I had to do to stop you was to kill."

To the magician who could not construct magic beyond a certain level of complexity, being "intentionally evolved" by Alfar was his last hope. And due to the delicacy of the plan, he could not necessarily create another Alfar with the same effects even by following the plans he had used before.

What was the most effective way of destroying that persistent magician's plan?

The answer was simple.

Just rob him of the irreplaceable Alfar before his eyes.

"…Ah…"

Slappar twisted his body, checked on the disaster that had befallen Alfar, and froze up.

Suddenly, an unpleasant noise came from down at Slappar's feet.

He had been preventing the puddles of acid from affecting him in some way, but the spell seemed to have gone away. Something like smoke started floating up from the bottoms of his feet.

The magician showed no sign of caring.

He had a few different options at that point.

One of those options had to have been to use some prearranged trap to give in to his anger and kill Kanzaki.

However, he did not do so.

There was no point in doing so.

After all, the reason behind everything the magician had been doing had been centered on his final hope that was Alfar. He had been unable to stop her death and he would likely be unable to carry out the delicate evolutionary adjustments he wanted with only her corpse.

Now that he had lost his last hope so easily, that young man fell to his knees. His knees landed directly on the acid. His clothes and skin started to burn, but his expression did not change. In fact, the muscles in his face were not moving at all.

"!!"

Kanzaki must not have been able to watch that because she approached the magician at high speed. The puddles did not spread around evenly. She stepped only on the slight areas that had no acid, grabbed the magician by the collar, and threw him as hard as she could. That human body flew over 10 meters as if it were a small doll.

"Please do not die so easily," Kanzaki said sounding annoyed. "We will be the ones to decide on your punishment."

The magician lying on the ground gave no response.

Slappar had lost all purpose in life and he continually muttered words that held no meaning for anyone but himself.

Part 11

"Well?" asked the jeans shop owner sounding bored.

He was gripping the wheel of an ecological car that looked like a classic car but was actually an electric car. Their job in Scotland was over, so they were on their way back to London.

The shop owner had a bruise on his cheek.

"I'm satisfied with running a small jeans shop in a corner of London and making just enough money to support my day to day life. I swear. So why did it end up like this!? That damn magician tried to kill me!! He's part of Necessarius, right? I'm in my rights as one of the normal people you should be protecting to resent you over that, right!?"

“If you are able to shout that much after receiving a serious attack from a professional magician, there does not seem to be a problem. And can we really call you a normal person after you had enough leeway to protect the tour guide?”

“Oh, come on. Is this the thanks I get for feeling a bit of volunteerism every now and then!?”

The shop owner continued to yell, but Kanzaki and the tour guide did not give him a proper response.

With tears welling up in his eyes, the shop owner glanced at the back seat through the rearview mirror and asked them a question.

“…By the way, what are you planning to do about Alfar?”

“I went out of my way to prepare fake blood with which to fool her creator, so it would be irresponsible to just leave her,” Kanzaki responded smoothly.

There were a few different styles of rune magic, but most of the time, it was carried out with the process of deciding where to carve each rune, actually carving the runes, and activating the spell by pouring blood or some other dye onto the runes.

Kanzaki had gone with the method of dying the carved rune with blood.

She had used her wires to carve exceedingly shallow marks in Alfar’s body and constructed a magical trick to make it appear that blood was erupting out.

The tour guide girl looked impressed.

“Yes, if you see someone cut straight from her shoulder to her side, spew a red liquid all over the place, and then collapse, you would think she was dead, wouldn’t you? But from what I heard, you were a pretty good distance away.”

“In modern warfare, the methods of using runes have been simplified so they can be carried out quickly. I know of a magician that mass produces runes with a copier. In older times, my method might have been suspected as being a trick from the moment blood or some kind of dye flew out from the grooves I had carved.”

She had been up against a magician who had thoroughly arranged a method of using rune magic by constructing the runes with supercooled water and ice crystals. It was possible that he had forgotten such a basic fact because he was so used to using rune magic.

However, even after hearing the results, the shop owner still seemed in a bit of a bad mood.

“And where did you get this dye?”

“…Well…”

“It was your own blood, wasn’t it? You used it up almost to the lethal level, didn’t you? We’re heading to a hospital later. You can get a normal blood transfusion despite being a Saint, right?”

Some Saints were born with special healing properties to their blood, so they could not receive a blood transfusion. However, Kanzaki was not that kind of Saint.

Kanzaki and the others got into a dispute over that, but their conversation suddenly stopped. Alfar had woken up in the back seat.

At first, she seemed uneasy because she did not know where she was, but then she looked uncomfortable when she realized she was wearing thick jeans that did not suit her at all.

Kanzaki smoothly said, “That is a type of spiritual item. I am sure I do not need to explain what it does or what it is sealing.”

“It’s just temporary though. In fact, that isn’t even how it’s supposed to be used. I had to make a few improvisations and resew it together like this, but this is at a level that mere methods of sewing aren’t going to cut it.”

Perhaps in order to match Alfar’s personality, the metal buttons and fasteners had been removed and replaced with new-looking ones made of wood.

The car was metal, but she did not show much of a rejection toward her surroundings. The jeans may have suppressed the reaction to metal as well as providing a resistance to her “evolution”.

She knew it was pointless, but she tried to get as much distance from her surroundings as she could within the small car before asking a question cautiously.

“…I told you to kill me back then. Did my meaning not get across?”

“Hm. Well, if that is what you meant, then I must have made a mistake,” Kanzaki responded not seeming to especially care.

Since he knew that she had used up her own blood almost to the lethal amount, the shop owner almost clicked his tongue, but he suppressed that urge with the power of reason.

“…What will happen to me now?”

“Necessarius has a research facility in one of the many castle ruins in the Lake District. There are records of magical life forms being created up to the beginning of the 20th century, so they should be able to isolate you and care for you properly. We will prevent you from having the kind of serious effect on the ecosystem you fear. Another team will soon gather the other animals within Brick Wharf.”

“A research facility…So they will be expecting something from me.”

“Officially, yes.”

“?”

Alfar looked confused and Kanzaki shrugged before responding.

“If we did not call it that, we could not use national facilities. And we may need those to develop a spiritual item that can completely suppress that evolution of yours.”

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第⑤巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第五話

海洋牢獄

NAGLFAR.

CHAPTER 5

Marine Prison.

NAGLFAR.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

The marine prison sailing through the Indian Ocean is experiencing trouble of unknown cause. The marine prison is currently headed on its own for the southern portion of India.

Around 500 enemy magicians that Necessarius captured around the world are held within the marine prison and the prison landing or running aground in India would mean those dangerous criminals would be free once more.

In order to prevent the escape of the magicians, please sink the marine prison as quickly as possible. Also, after sinking the marine prison, please kill any magicians attempting to swim to shore. Not even a single one can be allowed to survive. There is no need to put aside time to rescue the jailers, so please give suppressing the magicians top priority.

♦

"…Well, I'm sure you're just going to ignore this ridiculous genocidal order," said the jeans shop owner on the coast in the southern Indian city of Nagercoil. "How are you going to deal with this one? If that out of control marine prison lands here, tons of terrible magicians will be free. And these magicians are at the very least at the level of someone who would chop 50 children to pieces and cook them in a giant pot until the pieces fell apart."

"It does not look like we will be able to find a way of resolving this until we know why the marine prison has gone out of control."

Kanzaki was fed up with her superiors' orders to just let her colleagues die and it showed in her displeased voice.

She then turned toward the tour guide girl.

“What kind of craft is the marine prison anyway?”

“Umm…” The tour guide girl opened her memo pad. “Are you familiar with the luxurious Aqua Tunnel ships? …Well, they are technically submarines, not ships.”

“Those are the glass submarines, right?” the shop owner said with a grin on his face. “Aquariums have those clear tunnels heading through the bottom of a giant tank to make it look like you’re heading through the ocean, right? The Aqua Tunnel submarines are just an escalated version of that. By making a submarine out of thick bulletproof resin, they say you can enjoy the ocean in all sorts of ways from seeing colorful tropical fish to deep sea fish who live where the light of the sun never reaches. I’ve heard they occasionally do trips around the world, but apparently the race for tickets is so harsh no normal person can hope to get one. I’ve heard 12 Aqua Tunnel subs have been created.”

“Those are actually the marine prisons,” said the tour guide suddenly before flipping to a different page in her memo pad. “One of the Aqua Tunnels is a real luxurious ship prepared as a dummy and it actually makes trips around the world. However, the other eleven function as prisons.”

“Why did they go to all that effort…?” asked Kanzaki.

The tour guide girl flipped through her memo pad.

“Originally, the marine prisons were created to prevent bad magicians captured around the world from escaping before being brought to England. For that purpose, 11 marine prisons pass through the seven seas at set intervals. However, constantly fooling the science side’s radar and sonar would be too costly and it is not guaranteed to always work.” The tour guide answered Kanzaki’s question while glancing through her detailed notes. “As such, it was easier to create a situation where 12 luxury ships are constantly giving trips around the world but tickets are hard to get so people rarely take part. However, it would seem suspicious if no one ever took part in it. That is why one of them is open to the public as a dummy while the other eleven carry out their role as prisons.”

“I’m sure the prisons are nowhere near as nice to be on as the dummy.”

“Apparently, it is better than being on the galleys that used to transport slaves. It does not seem that anyone aboard is likely to die.”

“Then are you volunteering?” the shop owner said sounding annoyed before glancing around. “So how are the marine prisons controlled?”

“It does not seem that the prisoners took over the control room. In fact, it seems the marine prisons do not have anything like a control room.”

"?"

Kanzaki frowned and the tour guide girl explained.

"In order to prevent the prisoners from taking control, the marine prisons cannot be controlled from the inside. They can only be controlled remotely. Even if the prisoners rioted and took the jailers hostage, the marine prison would arrive at England with no issues."

With the water pressure in the depths of the ocean acting as a natural barrier and the submarine being controlled externally, there was no way to escape by rioting within the prison.

The security prepared by the Anglican Church was quite strict, but that showed just how cautious they were about those vile magicians.

But…

"Then I know what the most suspicious place is," said Kanzaki.

A marine prison holding many magical criminals was headed off course toward southern India, but her expression did not change.

"Something must have been done to the magic that remotely controls the prison. Isn't that the most likely possibility?"

Part 2

The marine prison was about 50 kilometers from reaching Nagercoil in southern India.

"The marine prison is controlled externally by a spiritual item known as the Cape of Good Hope."

"…So it's located at the bottom of Africa?" said the jeans shop owner sounding fed up with the situation already, but the tour guide girl frantically shook her head.

She flipped through her memo pad and said, "It is only a spiritual item with that name. As I said before, the marine prisons pass through the seven seas at set intervals. As such, a Cape of Good Hope for each sea is located near that sea. Control of this marine prison was lost in the Indian Ocean, so…"

"So the Cape of Good Hope in this country is most suspicious?"

“What Christian related things are famous in India? Is there a church with Francis Xavier’s tomb or something?”

“That is famous, but the Jesuits are under the Roman Catholic Church’s jurisdiction. That has no connection to the Anglican Church.”

“…Well, I’m just the virtuous owner of a jeans shop,” said the shop owner as he bought a banana drink at a stand seeming not to be very motivated anymore.

The tour guide quickly flipped through her memo pad.

“The main connection between England and India is the East India Company. During the Age of Exploration, England one-sidedly set up trading bases here. Of course, those are long gone, but a few ruins still remain.”

“So one of those had its magical security reactivated and the Cape of Good Hope was set there?”

“Well, to this country, the East India Company is a blot on their history. Even if it was done completely in secret to normal people, it was apparently still quite difficult to get permission to use the place again. …In the end, it was agreed that 30% of British-made satellites would be fired from Indian launch pads while the Cape of Good Hope is kept here.”

“I had wondered why we used Indian ones in this age when most launches are done from Academy City launch pads.”

“The EU launches their satellites from India quite a bit because they want to escape from NASA and Academy City’s monopolization of GPS, but the market race between the top two is apparently quite harsh.”

Russia was also strong in the space industry, but the scale of their systems was different, so they could not receive similar services from surrounding countries. In the near future, it seemed China would be entering the field as well and they feared the same thing would happen to them as to Russia.

“At any rate, we just have to head to these ruins of the East India Company and check on this Cape of Good Hope.”

“But the Cape of Good Hope here has a maintenance staff. Won’t they have been investigating the Cape of Good Hope ever since control of the marine prison was confirmed to be lost?”

“We could leave this to them if it was just some normal issue,” said Kanzaki without her expression changing. “But if a magician is interfering, they may overlook it with their methods. It would be best if anti-magician specialists like us helped check it over.”

Part 3

The three of them got a rental car and headed for the location of the Cape of Good Hope.

The jeans shop owner drove and the tour guide girl navigated from the passenger seat. Kanzaki sat in the back seat. That was their usual arrangement. As usual, Kanzaki's ridiculously long sword was stored in a surfboard case on the roof of the car.

"Shit! This car has been bumping around like crazy! Does it even have any suspension!? I am glad the cheap cars sell here though!!"

"You're losing your temper again. What's the matter?" asked the tour guide from the passenger seat.

The shop owner glared over at her.

"Don't act like you don't know. I thought I was finally headed back to England, but then I got dragged out to India without time to deal with any of the work that has piled up back at the shop!! What am I supposed to do about middle school Saten-chan!? Hey, could we swing by Japan on the way back!?"

"Oh, what should we do about dinner? I have checked on where the good Chinese restaurants on the outskirts are, so what about that?"

"I know Chinese food is a safe bet in any country, but let's get some Indian food while we're here!!"

"Food does not really matter, so can we please focus on resolving the incident unfolding before our eyes?"

Despite what Kanzaki said, she would surely be disappointed if she was given a hamburger from a worldwide chain. That was not an issue of how it tasted; it was simply due to the fact that they had come all the way to a foreign country.

The sounds and smells of the city entered through the car's open windows and the pleasant smell of spices from a normal house made their way inside. Their sensors as travelers started going off telling them that was what they wanted to eat rather than food at some unnecessarily expensive restaurant.

"Dammit. Forget all this marine prison crap…"

"There, there. Turn left at that small street and head straight on through there."

The shop owner drove the car as instructed and a brick wall came into view. However, it was only a wall. The old wall had crumbled in places as if it had been hit by an earthquake. The wall created a square, so it had likely originally been the outer wall of a building or surrounded a large garden. Even that was hard to tell.

Inside the 100 meters square brick wall was a building just a bit smaller. It was a simple square building that had no real design to it. It too was quite old. It looked old enough to make one doubtful as to whether it had any rebar in it.

The three of them got out of the car.

Kanzaki immediately grabbed her sword from the roof. She may have felt helpless without it at her waist.

She then looked up at the building.

“So this is the fortress for the Cape of Good Hope?”

“You’re looking at the building, right? Well, the actual core of the facility is the brick wall.”

As she spoke, the tour guide girl walked ahead of the other two. Kanzaki and the shop owner followed her through the gate and passed beyond the brick wall. It was difficult to tell if they had passed through a proper entrance or if it was just a large gap where the brick wall had crumbled.

As soon as they entered the facility, a dark shadow covered the area.

“?”

Kanzaki looked up and then froze in place.

A giant cube floated in the air a bit above the roof of the small three-story building. It seemed to be about 70 meters across on each side. It was made of a strange dull gray material that was different from simple stone or steel.

Metal panels and pipes created scaffolding like ivy covering a building wall. The scaffolding unnaturally stretched past the roof of the building and up to the height of the floating cube.

All of those things had not been there before.

Kanzaki frowned and asked a blunt question.

“Is that the Cape of Good Hope?”

“Yes, yes. That is the giant spiritual item that controls any marine prisons heading through the Indian Ocean. It has to have an effective range of over 9000 kilometers, so it had to be made quite large. And this one is actually much smaller than the one for the Pacific Ocean,” the tour guide said while flipping through her memo pad.

Then a brown-skinned young man who was likely a local magician came running over. He was wearing unfashionable work clothes likely as camouflage, but they made the various religious accessories he wore stand out even more.

“I have already been notified. You are here about the marine prison, right? We do not have much time, so let’s talk on the way.”

“I hope you do not mind, but one of us is not an official member of Necessarius,” Kanzaki said just to make sure, but the young man shook his head.

“I don’t mind, I don’t mind. Your organization is a gathering of people who only care about skill. Even I am sort of like a temporary worker for you. You take in people from different Christian denominations and even Hindus, so let’s just be flexible about that kind of thing,” said the young man in work clothes with a smile while he walked toward the building.

Kanzaki and the others followed him. It looked like the young man would enter the building, but he instead headed for the metal pipe scaffolding surrounding the walls.

“The building has no real meaning. It’s nothing more than a large framework for the scaffolding.”

“Why is that ridiculously huge dice-like thing floating?” asked the shop owner. “A proper method, materials, and fuel are needed to make something float. You wouldn’t make something that large float for no reason. Or are you using this metal framework to hold back something that floats up on its own?”

“No, no, no. It is nothing like that. It is like a lighthouse. This has to have an effective range of over 9000 kilometers in order to cover the Indian Ocean. It would not be able to cover beyond the horizon if it was placed on the ground.”

“In other words, this Cape of Good Hope floats up higher the farther away the marine prison is?” asked Kanzaki as she walked up the diagonally laid out metal pipes that acted as stairs.

The young man nodded.

“It is rare for it to get this close to the ground. Normally, it is over 1000 or 2000 meters up, so we worry that some airplane that can’t see it is going to hit it. …It is located in a place with little air traffic, but bad weather could suddenly change an airplane’s route or an unofficial fighter could pass by here.”

“Two thousand meters, hm? It looks like the metal pipe scaffolding is made to automatically expand and contract to the height of the Cape of Good Hope, but the thought of working in an area with great gusts of wind makes me shudder.”

“Yes, well, it is not exactly a pleasant job. …Oh, and the scaffolding is changing bit by bit even now, so make sure you don’t get your fingers caught in a joint.”

As they spoke, the four of them headed up and up and up beyond the height of the roof.

They had probably reached a point about 20 meters above the surface.

They had finally arrived at the Cape of Good Hope.

They were close enough to the side of the cube to reach out and touch it. Kanzaki looked over it again and its heavy stone surface seemed to have narrow grooves carved into it. That may have been why the material it was made from had been hard to identify from a distance.

Due to the slight cross wind, the tour guide was practically embracing Kanzaki in fear. Regardless, Kanzaki began speaking with the young man in the work clothes.

“Has there been anything odd about the functioning of the Cape of Good Hope?”

“That’s the thing,” the young man said as he shook his head with a troubled look on his face. “Thirty of us here have investigated it, but we have not found the slightest trace of anything.”

“Can you really thoroughly investigate a spiritual item this huge so easily?”

“True. It would take three years for 10 expert magicians to carefully check through every little groove.” The young man did not deny that fact. “But it is made so that you can find any abnormalities by checking just a few important points. At the very least, a scan using that method found no problems. Currently, we have split into a group to do that scan again and one to check things over by hand, but we have no idea how many years it will take to find the cause at this rate.”

“Hmm.” Kanzaki thought for a bit before looking back toward the young man. “Wouldn’t it be best to stop this Cape of Good Hope altogether? At the very least, wouldn’t that prevent the out of control marine prison from approaching the land any further?”

“I do not have the authority to do that,” replied the young man with a sigh. “And the seven Cape of Good Hopes create a single system. If we stop this one, the others will not be able to function properly either. Currently, control of only one marine prison has been lost, but it is conceivable that control of all 11 could be lost. If it happens in the middle of a large ocean, that’s fine, but one could drift ashore if it stops near land or an island.”

“At any rate, we need to do something about this thing,” said the shop owner as he stared at the side of the giant cube.

The young man in the work clothes nodded.

“If an expert magician did something, he could have made sure a normal scan would not find it. If we can find that and eliminate it, we might then be able to locate any abnormal areas.”

The young man said that, but he sounded somehow unconfident. He likely did not think such a convenient loophole existed in the spiritual item they had been using for so long.

Kanzaki pulled a looped bundle of wires seemingly from nowhere.

“Well, let’s get started.”

“Go for it, Kanzaki.”

When the shop owner halfheartedly cheered her on, Kanzaki looked coldly at him.

“…Don’t just sit there like you’re only here to have fun. In fact, this is primarily your job.”

“Hm? Oh, are we going with that method?”

Without responding to his question, Kanzaki moved her fingers at high speed. The motions were similar to making a Japanese string figure, but her fingertips moved so quickly that it looked like someone had fused a loom and a sewing machine. In only about 10 seconds, she had created a steel ribbon 5 centimeters thick and 3 meters long.

The tour guide looked confused and the shop owner explained as Kanzaki handed him the ribbon.

“Clothing has held religious meaning both in the East and the West since ancient times. You can see this in everything from ancient shrine maidens and priests to princesses’ dresses and nuns’ habits. But in most cases, purity was stressed with those clothes and the slightest stain was looked down on.”

The shop owner pulled something out of his pocket.

It looked like a thick marker, but it was not. It held business-use stain remover. It was meant to be rubbed on an especially bad stain, but it looked so powerful that it would ruin the clothes if it were put straight into the washing machine.

He then drew a thick line at an arbitrary point along the steel ribbon.

“In other words, most clothes have a process with which they react to their own stains. It’s similar to how it is difficult to see a drop of coffee spilled on the table but it stands out on a piece of white clothing.”

A great noise rang out.

As if the steel ribbon had become a runway, the clear stain remover slid unnaturally along it. It moved beyond the ribbon and into open air where it traveled in a large arc. It moved to the giant cube that was the Cape of Good Hope and traveled at high speed along it. It made a 90 degree turn and moved out of sight in no time at all.

The shop owner put the cap back on the stain removal pen and put it back in his pocket while he scratched at his head in annoyance.

“Now that will find any stains needing to be removed. If we investigate around any areas the chemical sticks to, we should find something.”

“I see. That really is convenient.”

“Yeah, but the situations it can be used in are pretty limited. You saw Kanzaki weaving together that ribbon, right? This only worked because she managed to weave the wires together in a way that corresponded to the patterns on the surface of the Cape of Good Hope.”

Suddenly, the stain remover reappeared around the opposite corner it had disappeared around. The clear chemical passed by Kanzaki and the others and disappeared around the same corner it had the first time. It seemed to be rotating around the center of the Cape of Good Hope like the rings of Saturn.

It showed no sign of landing anywhere.

The shop owner looked confused over the fact that it seemed as if it would rotate forever if left alone.

“Odd.”

“If it is not reacting to anything, does that mean the magician’s concealment techniques were quite high level?”

The shop owner shook his head in response to the young man’s question.

“With as nice a match as we got, this should find something. Even if something was concealed, that would just make this spell fail when I tried to activate it.”

“Then…?”

“No response means that nothing has been done to the Cape of Good Hope.”

Part 4

The marine prisons had many ways that they prevented the prisoners from escaping.

One of those was the lack of a control room within the submarine.

In other words, it could not be moved from within.

As the steering of the ship was carried out by the giant external spiritual item known as the Cape of Good Hope, the prisoners within the submarine could not hijack the submarine and change its course no matter how hard they tried.

"…That is how it works. Is there any way to control the marine prison without using the Cape of Good Hope?" asked the tour guide as she checked through her notes.

They had no more business with the Cape of Good Hope, but they had no other ideas either. As such, Kanzaki and the others were having a strategy meeting within the rental car parked near the Cape of Good Hope. As they did so, the marine prison was approaching southern India. Given the height of the Cape of Good Hope from the ground, it seemed to be about 25 kilometers out. If they did not come up with a counter measure soon, they would truly be in trouble.

"You heard her," said the jeans shop owner with a sigh as he leaned back in the driver seat. "What do you think? Do you think there is some other way to alter the course of this toy ship in the bath other than going through the proper route and using the Cape of Good Hope?"

"…It is true that there are plenty of legends about ships with mystical abilities and ceremonies or charms to calm storms or prevent shipwrecks. With the level of technology people used to have, the ocean was a frightening thing, so they readily relied on the occult."

Kanzaki placed her hand on her cheek as she thought in the back seat.

The tour guide fidgeted in the passenger seat and blinked a few times.

"Th-then is some magician causing that submarine to correspond to a boat or charm from a religious context?"

"What magician would that be?" said the shop owner as he leaned back causing his headrest to creak. "You're only coming up with this supposed magician because the marine prison can't be controlled from the inside and so someone other than the prisoners has to control the Cape of Good Hope. But there was nothing wrong with the Cape of Good Hope. …Who gains the most from the marine prison running aground? Let's keep this simple: It would clearly be the prisoners."

“It’s true they have the most motive, but…” said Kanzaki sounding indecisive, but the shop owner cut in and continued speaking.

“Noah’s Ark, the boat of Kalevala, Skíðblaðnir, the Sky Ship…take your pick. The UFOs the science side is researching despite there being doubts about them may be something similar. There are plenty of legends and rules they can use.”

“If they are using some kind of rules to freely control the marine prison,” said Kanzaki taking control of the situation now that her thoughts were in order, “the main issue is whether the marine prison designed by Necessarius would leave them the ability to carry it out. Even if they are using some legend, they would need the proper symbols to do so. …Our superiors are the people who removed the control room from the submarines in order to prevent the prisoners from escaping. I would be willing to bet they would thoroughly eliminate any magical symbols the prisoners could use.”

“Then it would have to be something that wasn’t there when it was designed,” the shop owner said while tuning the car’s radio to a channel with an English broadcast. “That would mean someone had to have brought it in.”

“But they cannot do that so easily…no, wait.”

Kanzaki started to deny that possibility, but she stopped suddenly.

The tour guide girl was still not convinced, so she spoke up with a frown.

“Can they really do that? The jailers in control of the prisoners are expert magicians. I’m sure they at least perform a body search before the prisoners board the marine prison.” The tour guide flipped through her memo pad to check on something. “Ah, here we go. They are not allowed to bring any personal items aboard. They are forced to put on special prisoner uniforms and all of their original clothing including their underwear is confiscated. Those personal items are transported on a different ship, so they would not be able to regain them within the marine prison. There are plenty of other ways they check as well. Even if the prisoners swallowed a piece of a tool, I am pretty sure it would be easily found.”

“No. If it was something that was not recognized as a magical symbol….” Kanzaki muttered. “No, it is not even that. It is possible for the prisoners to hijack the submarine using something that had to be brought aboard given the purpose of the marine prison even if it was known to be a magical symbol.”

“?”

“Do you think they could pull it off if they had a large scale spell that could be activated with a ‘material’ that would make it through the jailers’ body search?”

The shop owner and the tour guide seemed confused as they looked back toward the back seat.

“Have you heard of a ship called Naglfar? It appears in Norse mythology.”

“You don’t mean…”

“It is a giant ship that appears in opposition to Skíðblaðnir, the ship Odin and the other gods ride. Riding it are the Muspel, the enemies of the gods, and is controlled by Loki, who betrayed the gods. In other words…”

Kanzaki paused for a second.

When she spoke again, she sounded as if she were checking with herself more than the others.

“A giant ship with criminals aboard it. …That in and of itself is a magical symbol.”

If that were the case, the prisoners would not have to bring anything aboard and the jailers could not eliminate the magical symbol despite knowing its danger. …After all, the marine prison was a ship used to transport prisoners, so eliminating it would accomplish nothing.

“The legend says Naglfar was created from the fingernails and toenails of the dead. The prisoners likely placed their fingernails and toenails in various places on the ship in order to turn the marine prison into Naglfar. …If they succeeded in that, the marine prison would change from being the jailers’ ship to being the prisoners’ ship. It would be completely natural for the right to control of the ship to transfer to them.”

Hearing Kanzaki speak from the back seat, the tour guide started flipping through her memo pad in the passenger seat.

Her memo pad was not an encyclopedia.

However, it seemed to be able to draw the needed information out of a giant database in London. The tour guide watched the cursive writing that appeared automatically on the blank page.

“I have a report here from an experiment related to Naglfar carried out in the harbor town of Tynemouth. Due to a certain process done to a wooden ship only 50 cm long, it was successfully controlled remotely. If the scale was increased, that process could possibly be used on the marine prison.”

“…What’s with that memo pad? If you can always use it like that, how about you stop asking us so many questions about things?”

“I can only call up news-like topics. I cannot just search for the details of a spell.”

“At any rate,” Kanzaki said attempting to bring the conversation back on track. “It seems the prisoners would be able to hijack the marine prison on their own using Naglfar, the ship said to be made from the fingernails and toenails of the dead.”

“That’s easy enough to say, but…”

“Yes, that ‘of the dead’ is a problem.”

Kanzaki gritted her teeth.

The tour guide girl had said the condition aboard the marine prisons was good enough that no one would die aboard it, but that had likely changed. In the process of hijacking the ship, at least a few of the prisoners would have had to die.

It may have been the result of concentrated violence against the weakest of them.

Or some may have willingly ended their lives in order to carry out the plan.

In either case, it was not a pleasant scene to imagine.

But…

“Now that we know how they did it, we can take action,” Kanzaki said. “I will head directly to the marine prison. Basically, I will carry out a simple seajacking. If I defeat the prisoners who have taken a leading role on the ship and eliminate the fingernails and toenails of the dead, the marine prison should return to its original course.”

“You’re talking about going up against a sub. I’m not quite sure how you plan to travel across the ocean, but more importantly…do Saints like you have the ability to withstand that kind of water pressure?”

“Our enemy is not the marine prison. It is Naglfar,” Kanzaki replied calmly to the shop owner. “The ship in the Norse myth could not dive. If the prisoners truly had it imitate Naglfar, the ship had to have come up to the surface. If not, it would not properly function as the needed magical symbol.”

“Then let’s head back to the Nagercoil beach,” the shop owner said while he manipulated the gear stick of the automatic car. His tone was different from before. “I know I have no right to say something this self-important after leaving all the fighting to you, but don’t let your guard down. If the marine prison really has been turned into Naglfar, the prisoners aboard may have been turned into the Muspel, the enemies of the gods. …In Norse mythology, the gods were about evenly matched with their enemies. In the climax of the mythology, most of the gods are taken out by their enemies while also defeating those enemies. I don’t know if it will carry over and work on a Christian Saint, but the prisoners may have some ability to weaken any kind of holy power.”

And even if they did not, there were still around 500 prisoners aboard and they were all expert magicians who had carried out heinous crimes across the world. It was clear to anyone that she could not be optimistic about taking on all of them at once aboard the ship.

“I will be fine,” Kanzaki immediately responded.

She was not overestimating her abilities as a Saint. Her words were intended to comfort those that were worried for her safety.

“There is a method for fighting on top of a ship and a method for fighting within a narrow passageway. You cannot win something like this simply by having more people.”

“Tch,” the shop owner clicked his tongue while looking at Kanzaki’s thin smile through the rearview mirror. He then spoke quietly while holding the steering wheel. “The marine prison is 25 kilometers from land. If things start looking bad, contact us. I’ll draw a magic circle on the beach so I can strengthen your abilities remotely.”

“Um, you casually say some amazing things sometimes. Just what level would you be within Necessarius?”

“Shut up. I’m just the owner of a jeans shop,” the shop owner responded to the tour guide’s out of place question.

Suddenly, they heard a great roar. It was an odd sound a bit like bursting electricity but was clearly different in some way. Kanzaki covered her ears and felt a mirage-like distortion in the nearby scenery. The brick wall used to hide the giant Cape of Good Hope spiritual item shook briefly.

The brick wall quickly regained its functionality and the mirage-like illusion disappeared.

But Kanzaki’s expression stiffened.

That had been caused by a barrier of similar strength striking the brick wall’s barrier. In other words, someone who was completely hiding their body and presence with a barrier had passed by nearby at high speed. The fact that the person was using a barrier on the same level as the Cape of Good Hope’s proved that they must have had some powerful spiritual item.

Immediately afterwards, Kanzaki’s cell phone started to vibrate.

No, technically it was the small charm stuck to the phone that vibrated. It was a spiritual item used for communications. Whoever it had been had determined the workings of Kanzaki’s spiritual item in the instant he or she passed by and had precisely cut in.

Kanzaki did not need to put the phone to her ear. A female voice came from the small device in her pocket and filled the car as if the phone was on speakerphone.

“You’re out of time, you fool. You need to take out your target faster than that. I’ll go take out that sturgeon guarding its disgusting caviar.”

“Are you from Necessarius, too?”

Kanzaki’s expression turned bitter.

Kanzaki was pretty sure that was the first time she had met the girl, but her words were enough to tell Kanzaki she was likely a belligerent person.

“There is no need to sink it and kill all of them! Control was lost because the marine prison was turned into Naglfar!! If the fingernails and toenails of the dead are removed from various places within the ship, control will return to the Cape of Good Hope and the jailers and prisoners will not need to be killed!!”

“Hm? Oh, good work, good work. I was wondering why you spent so much time on land, but I guess you were investigating all that boring stuff.”

The girl likely understood the situation to a certain extend (Kanzaki doubted she would have passed by and contacted her otherwise), but she still responded mockingly like that.

“But that doesn’t matter.”

“What…?”

“We already have our orders: kill all of them. So we just have to kill them. What good will giving it so much thought do? Will you get some kind of bonus out of it? If not, it’s pointless. We just have to do what needs to be done and then return to England. We are given all sorts of authority and paid from the people’s tax money because they expect that of us. You may be trying to be a philanthropist, but all you’re doing is betraying your superiors.”

“That marine prison is one of only 11 large transport ships. Surely our superiors would prefer to have this problem resolved with as little loss as possible!!”

“Ha ha. A logical excuse, hm? It’s obvious you came up with that afterwards. Not to mention that it’s meaningless. The higher ups have already calculated out what cost will be needed to resolve this and they still ordered us to sink it. There is no reason to think so hard about this. Your superiors are not expecting to receive a bonus from you. They look down on you when they pay you.”

“The jailers are part of Necessarius, too!! Do you plan on killing your colleagues!?”

“I don’t care,” the girl responded without even pausing for an instant. “Managing the prisoners is their job and yet they carelessly allowed this crisis to occur. They should be prepared for what awaits them.”

“Dammit!!”

The transmission was cut off from the other side.

Kanzaki reached for the rental car’s back door.

“I am going on ahead. At this distance, I can run there faster!!”

“Hey, hey, hey! This seems to have gotten even more troublesome!!”

Without even listening to the rest of the shop owner’s frantic words, Kanzaki left the car, grabbed Shichiten Shichitou from the roof, and jumped using her leg strength.

Due to possessing bodily characteristics similar to the Son of God, Saints could freely use a portion of his power.

By using that power to strengthen her physical abilities, Kanzaki could temporarily move at speeds greater than the speed of sound.

Kanzaki leapt up to a nearby building at a speed slow enough to not produce a shockwave. As she continued to jump from building to building, her speed quickly turned supersonic.

She was heading for the beach of Nagercoil in southern India.

(I need to catch up to and stop that girl before she reaches the ocean!!)

Kanzaki gritted her teeth as she ran and jumped at a speed that caused the edges of the scenery to distort like a sugar sculpture.

She could not see the attacker’s back.

The magician was using a high level concealment spell, but she also had to have been moving at a fairly high speed.

But…

(How naïve.)

As she left the urban area and approached the beach, Kanzaki kept her breathing even more regular than before. She was not using a simple breathing method used for sports. That breathing method supported the mental activity that went along with high level thoughts.

She stared at a point straight ahead.

She poured more power into her legs.

(I doubt you can lose a Saint like me with nothing more than speed!!)

“Hh!!”

She suddenly accelerated as if shooting straight forward into open space.

She caught up to a strange mass that could only be seen as a slight blur and then slammed her shoulder forward as if tackling someone and spun her arms around.

“!?”

She heard the sound of someone’s breath catching in her throat nearby, but Kanzaki ignored it and slammed the person down into the white sand.

It looked like the scene of an airplane crashing. The fine sand exploded up into the air and the two bodies rolled for a few hundred meters. The cloud of sand spread out in a straight line following them.

At the speed they were travelling, even a grain of sand held the destructive force of a file. The only reason Kanzaki and the girl’s bodies were not ripped to pieces was because they had both activated defensive magic just before striking the ground.

Even so, they were not completely unscathed.

“…Ow…”

When Kanzaki got up, her target magician was no longer in her arms. Her opponent had likely escaped in the instant her focus had been turned toward the defensive spell. She scanned the area with her sharp eyes and spotted another figure getting up a bit away.

It was a girl with brown hair.

Her age seemed to be similar to Kanzaki’s.

The rough looking girl wore a sports brand T-shirt and a miniskirt, but she had two backpacks on her back for some reason. She was carrying both backpacks by only one strap with one on the right shoulder and the other on the left.

They most likely contained spiritual items of some type.

Kanzaki raised her guard and the girl spoke while casually brushing the sand from her hair.

“Well, you’ve really made a mess of things. This isn’t London. We don’t have a system in place to conceal this kind of thing. If you don’t at least activate a people clearing spell, we have no way of preventing any witnesses.”

“Who are you…?”

“We don’t have time for introductions.”

After saying that, the girl suddenly accelerated.

She headed straight for the marine prison as if challenging Kanzaki to a race.

“!!”

Without hesitating, Kanzaki headed for the ocean as if alongside her.

Kanzaki Kaori had no way to walk on water.

However, the ocean off of Nagercoil was not completely lacking in impurities. By using the slight bit of buoyancy of empty cans, bottles, driftwood, scraps of seaweed, and nets, Kanzaki was able to move quickly from one object to the next.

Meanwhile, there was no regularity to the girl’s movements, but her method was similar. She took some small objects from her backpack and scattered them in the water. She moved along those objects. The objects’ details were unknown, but they seemed to be triangles a few centimeters across.

As they both travelled toward the marine prison, Kanzaki had a question in her heart.

Her method of travelling over the water had to be forced to work using the leg strength of a Saint.

How was the other magician able to keep up?

Even if she was strengthening her physical abilities with a spiritual item, she should not have been so easily on par with Kanzaki. A Saint had special qualities and talents that fewer than 20 people in the world had. If the level of a Saint was so easily reached, they would not be praised as they were.

And yet…

“Hh!!”

Kanzaki sharply changed the direction she travelled in and suddenly approached the girl. Before the girl could react, she swung her hips around to perform a flying kick.

With a tremendous noise, the girl’s body was blown away to the side.

Perhaps due to the tremendous speed, the magician’s body skipped like a stone across the water two or three times rather than just sinking down into the water.

However, she did not collapse or sink in the end.

The magician lowered her speed a certain extent partway through, but still started moving quickly across the ocean once more.

(She received an attack from me and got back up…?)

She had not escaped the force of the blow. The shock of the impact had clearly been sent straight into the magician's body. And Kanzaki's hand to hand fighting ability was at the level where she could easily destroy a thick concrete wall with one arm.

"Is it really that surprising?" The magician smiled and reached a hand toward the two backpacks on her back. "Saints are not the only ones who can boast of superhuman strength."

She scattered a lot of something around.

They were the objects with triangular sides.

They were made of leather.

They may have been polished with high quality wax because one surface shined like an ebony desk while the other side seemed to be soft and loose.

Immediately afterwards, the magician disappeared with a roar. She was headed straight for Kanzaki. In the time it took Kanzaki to realize that, the magician's fist was already headed for her face.

"!?"

Kanzaki was shocked to find herself being knocked straight backwards.

She had thought she had escaped just beyond the range of the magician's fist.

And yet…

(…Gh…!?)

A dull shock had struck the entire front of her body rather than just her face. Just before the magician had sent her fist forward, she had gathered power by stomping down on the ocean…or more accurately, on the triangular piece of leather floating there. The instant she did, the splash of seawater that shot up around her foot had struck Kanzaki's body with tremendous speed. The shock felt less like a spray of water and more like a steel wall.

Kanzaki shot across the water, fell, but finally stood up atop a plastic bottle instead of sinking below the surface. Meanwhile, the magician looked down at her fist.

“Tch. I’m just not suited for sea battles.”

“Was that…Víðarr’s…?”

“Yes, his shoe.”

The magician jumped high into the air.

After reaching a height of 10 meters, she aimed for Kanzaki on her way down.

Part 5

A god named Víðarr existed within Norse mythology.

He ruled over superhuman strength.

In terms of pure strength, he was said to be second only to Thor.

The role given to him was simple. He was to kill Fenrir after it devoured Odin during the final battle of Ragnarok. In the legend, Víðarr grabbed Fenrir’s giant upper jaw with both hands, stepped on its lower jaw with his shoe, and ripped its body in two.

Víðarr wore a special shoe.

It was made of leather. It was not made of a special sacred material made especially for a weapon of the gods. Instead, it had been made by gathering together the triangular pieces of leather cast aside while human leather shoes were being made.

In other words…

“As long as you know how to make it, no other weapon of the gods is so easy to gather the materials for and to make.”

“!!”

Kanzaki frantically fled to the side away from the magician who shot down from above like a meteor. She sent much more seawater out than before and with much more force, but there was nothing to fear if you knew it was coming. Kanzaki immediately wielded her wires and sliced the wall of water to pieces.

But that had only been the aftereffect.

If she had taken a direct hit, even a Saint like Kanzaki would have been in trouble.

The spiritual item the magician used was clearly not complete as Víðarr's Shoe. It was nothing more than a large amount of the material. But that actually gave her a general strengthening beyond just her legs.

But…

(Is that really all there is…?)

The fists and legs that continually came at Kanzaki held enough force to turn a failed defense into a fatal error. Kanzaki moved in a complex curving path and kept enough of a distance that the magician could not catch up.

(It does make sense that using Víðarr's power and taking an independent interpretation of the triangles of leather could spread the range of the strengthening effect, but is that really all she needs to rival a Saint?)

If not, there had to be something else going on.

Had she prepared some other trick allowing her to outdo a Saint?

Or had she done something to weaken Kanzaki?

Just as Kanzaki got that far in her thoughts, the magician quickly approached her.

A chill ran down Kanzaki's back, but…

(So…)

She did not evade. Instead, she reached for the grip of her sword.

(…that's it!!)

A roar exploded out.

The magician swung her fist. With just that motion, Kanzaki's body was knocked over 10 meters to the side. She had immediately raised the sword hanging at her waist and tried to block, but a shock that threatened the joints ran up her arms.

But that was all.

If she had taken that blow full on, she would likely have taken severe damage on a skeletal level whether she had been defending or not. She would no longer have been able to move at high speed using the empty cans and other objects floating in the ocean.

The magician seemed confused and Kanzaki opened her mouth to speak.

“Víðarr’s Shoe was created to trample on the fangs of Fenrir who even swallowed the chief Norse god and to support that god of superhuman strength. Your ‘shoes’ use that theory to simply increase physical strength,” Kanzaki said while still being chased. “However, that effect does not apply only to yourself.”

Hearing that, the magician grinned.

“Oh, so you figured it out?”

“By instantaneously increasing the strength of the wind around you, you increased the strength of your powerful fist even further. I’m guessing you use the repellent force of the waves to increase your leg strength. And just before you attack me, you increase the gravity or something else affecting me in order to lower my speed just a bit.”

Any one of the phenomena would not have been enough to apply decisive damage to a Saint. However, with the positives on the magician’s side and the negatives on Kanzaki’s side, the magician was able to produce more destructive force then a proper attack would.

“But it’s too late.” The magician grinned wider. “We’re too far out to sea. Look, you can already see the marine prison.”

“I won’t let you!!”

The magician tried to move quickly for the marine prison and lose Kanzaki, but her movements suddenly dulled.

She looked and saw that Kanzaki’s wires had sliced apart the triangular pieces of leather scattered about the ocean surface. The slices were curved rather than in straight lines.

“And I thought you wouldn’t be able to withstand my attack even if you had realized the theory behind it.”

“Well, I now know what the source of your power is. If I destroy those triangles of leather, you will return to being a normal magician.”

Even if triangles were sliced with a straight line, at least one half would form another triangle. However, that was not the case when they were sliced apart with curving cuts.

She could destroy the triangles.

“But…” the magicians said and snapped her fingers.

That must have been a sign to strengthen the surrounding wind because the leather remnants Kanzaki’s wires had sliced apart were sliced further. The fan-shapes made of two straight lines and one curve were returned to a triangular shape.

“The triangle is the basis of polygons. Any polygon can be split into multiple triangles using straight lines.”

In that case, their methods of fighting were clear.

Kanzaki would win if she could use her wires to slice the triangles of leather and destroy their triangular shape as quickly as possible.

The magician would win if she used Víðarr’s Shoe to manipulate the wind and water to return the sliced pieces to a triangular shape and increase her speed.

It was a simple battle of speed.

The one who created more of their shape would win and the one with fewer would lose.

So…

The two magicians sent slicing attacks out around themselves at extremely high speed.

The wind blew and the waves disappeared.

In an instant, dozens of the pieces of leather were sliced apart with curving lines and in the next instant, they were returned to a pile of triangles. The distribution of what amount Kanzaki and the magician controlled changed from moment to moment like two people trying to paint the same wall different colors.

They did not directly attack each other, but their actions indirectly led to striking a fatal blow to the other.

As that battle of stealing the realm of control back and forth spread, the magician smiled.

She could win.

No matter what shape Kanzaki cut the triangles of leather into, she could always create another triangle by adding on another cut. In other words, the magician’s power would not lessen. In fact, by creating a triangle out of both halves created by the curved slice, she could increase the number of triangles and therefore increase the source of her strength.

As long as she did not make any major mistakes, she could keep up with the speed. And as the number of triangles grew, the magician’s strength grew as well.

Eventually, her speed would outdo Kanzaki’s.

Once that happened, she could take out Kanzaki before the other girl could slice apart the triangles of leather. It was just a matter of time. If the magician could keep things going without making any mistakes, she would be victorious.

But…

“This is not merely an issue of speed,” Kanzaki said quietly as she wielded her seven wires a bit away. “You will realize soon that this is also an issue of accuracy.”

(…?)

Was she saying small mistakes would eventually show up in a protracted battle?

However, that was not it.

An exceedingly simple problem arose just as Kanzaki had predicted.

It was an issue of size.

The triangles of leather constructing Víðarr’s Shoe had only been a few centimeters long. Kanzaki was slicing through them with her wires and the magician was returning them to a triangular shape. Two things happened as a result of this.

First, the number increased which increased the magician’s strength.

Second, the size of the triangles of leather got smaller and smaller.

Even the original triangles that were a few centimeters across required a good bit of skill to slice through accurately from a distance. Once the size had gone down to half or even a quarter of that and they were only a few millimeters across, the success rate dropped.

It was similar to firing a gun at a target.

Even at the same distance, one’s accuracy would fall the smaller the target became. Once the target was only a few millimeters across, it was like firing through the eye of a needle.

And…

If the magician lost, she would lose her strength and be defeated by Kanzaki.

“Kh…!!”

The magician felt like her mental vision suddenly narrowed. It was like a game of chicken heading straight for the edge of a cliff. She had to slam on the brakes because she was getting to the point where she was not sure if she could handle it, but her opponent continued heading on and on, so she had no choice but to go on herself.

Meanwhile, their battle had become an even more delicate one where both speed and accuracy had to be used in unison. As the battle escalated from a few millimeters, to a single millimeter, and then to the realm even smaller than that, the magician was made aware of something about her own characteristics.

It was true that her strength increased as the number of triangles increased.

However, an increase in strength was not necessarily a good thing.

It was the same as how a light jab was easier to hit with than a powerful straight.

The more her strength increased…

…the harder it became to aim carefully!?

(No…!!)

In all honesty, the magician wanted to quit.

Her head was warning her that she could not keep up if things advanced any further.

But Kanzaki Kaori was still accurately using her wires to slice the leather further and further and further and further as if she were a piece of accurate machinery. The spiritual items were smaller than a millimeter putting them at about the size of a grain of sand, but she was still swiftly and surely slicing them.

It was not just an issue of superhuman strength and speed.

One also needed the precision to accurately wield one's power in that realm. Saints were said to have such rare talent because they had the precise control needed to fully wield their power.

(So this is…)

The magician gritted her teeth and felt a sensation escape her.

She had sliced through air.

That showed that she could no longer keep up with the accuracy needed at that scale.

And…

Kanzaki Kaori was still swinging her wires.

The triangles that were smaller than a millimeter were sliced to pieces in an instant.

(So this is a Saint…!)

The magician's speed suddenly dropped.

She could feel the assistance from Víðarr's Shoe quickly leaving her.

Kanzaki charged straight for the magician.

With a roar, the magician was blown away by a blow from Kanzaki's scabbard.

The magician flew over 100 meters before landing and she skipped off the surface two or three times when she did. It looked similar to when someone failed in an attempt at water skiing.

The magician flew right past the giant submarine they had been approaching and then finally sank down.

Kanzaki created a magic circle with her wires to activate a communications spell allowing her voice to be heard within the ship.

Kanzaki moved to a point blocking the submarine's path and spoke.

"I do not know who your leader is, so I will address all of you. …You saw what just occurred, did you not?"

As she made the following announcement, Kanzaki pointed at her own chest with her thumb.

"If you still wish to fight me after seeing that, feel free to come at me."

Part 6

The marine prison was returned from being Naglfar and control returned to the Cape of Good Hope. The danger of the prisoners escaping to land had been eliminated. Apparently, the prison was back on its normal course and headed for England.

"You've convinced me anew that Saints are monsters," muttered the jeans shop owner. "Stopping 500 heinous criminals with nothing but words is not normal."

Kanzaki had returned from the ocean and had an awkward look on her face.

"I do not understand why you are treating me like a monster for resolving this peaceably."

"How can you say that after charging off at over the speed of sound and plowing into the beach like that? How far do you think the panic would have spread if we had not already set up concealment spells?"

“Uuh…”

It had been an emergency, but she still should not have done that.

Meanwhile, the tour guide messed with the edge of a page of her memo pad looking bored.

“What is going to become of the marine prisons? That same method of hijacking can be used on any large ship with prisoners aboard. There’s no way to prevent it from happening again…”

“It required the fingernails and toenails of the dead. If they rip off the prisoners’ nails before they board, there won’t be any more problems,” the shop owner said jokingly.

When Kanzaki glared at him, he explicitly stated he was joking.

“According to Norse mythology, the completion of Naglfar, the ship of the enemies of the gods, would signify the completion of their preparations for the final battle of Ragnarok. Naglfar is made of the fingernails and toenails of the dead, so the dead’s nails are supposed to be cut off before they are buried in order to delay Ragnarok as long as possible.”

“…”

“Tearing off the nails may be going too far, but drawing some kind of symbol on their nails and taking some method so they can’t use them to create Naglfar would work, right? They could use a spell that temporarily keeps them from growing beyond the finger or put some kind of caps on their fingers.”

As she listened to the shop owner, Kanzaki turned back toward the ocean just once.

Due to the distance, she could not see the marine prison. As she thought of the prison that had disappeared beyond the horizon, she spoke.

“…Ideally, we would create a society that does not need those submarines at all.”

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第⑥巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第六話

最高の一瞬

BIFROST.

CHAPTER 6

The Best Moment.

BIFROST.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

We have located the base of Orlentz, a magician who we have been recently pursuing.

Please take care of Orlentz who has built base at the point indicated on the map attached to the other document.

Orlentz was performing research in the field of immortality, but an investigation by a separate unit made it clear that his theory has already failed. Even so, Orlentz is showing no sign of ending his research and we fear he could get the lives of many people involved.

Please quickly and definitively deal with Orlentz.

As we know that his theory has failed, Orlentz's equipment and documents need not be preserved. Give Orlentz top priority and do not worry if the equipment or documents are destroyed in the process.

♦

That was the situation, but Kanzaki Kaori was sitting in a seat rather than swinging her drawn sword around. Her long legs and her arms were crossed and she did not have her usual atmosphere of calm. To put it bluntly, she was clearly in a bad mood.

The jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl were not with her.

Kanzaki was the only one participating in the current mission.

The shop owner had rejoiced that he was finally free to pack up and ship out the jeans for online orders, but he was likely magically monitoring Kanzaki's actions in order to provide backup if necessary. Kanzaki did not particularly care.

She was in a small space.

It was something like a larger version of a Ferris wheel car.

It was made of a cold black stone, but a geologist would probably frown upon seeing it. Or he may rejoice at having discovered a new material.

She was in Orlentz's base.

Or more accurately, she was in one portion of it.

It could be thought of as something like a ship and a port. Orlentz hated having others get near his base, so he had constructed a long passage that had to be traversed to reach it. Kanzaki was hiding aboard the "ship" that travelled down it.

"Hey."

Kanzaki suddenly heard a girl speaking.

A girl of about 12 was sitting in the opposite seat. She had shoulder-length blonde hair and an intimidating look in her eyes. She wore a white blouse and skirt and her slender legs were covered in black stockings, so she somehow gave a grand piano-like impression. She was not even 140 cm tall, but she was quite an arrogant child. The girl was accompanied by a man in black formal clothing and she toyed with the hair touching her cheek as she spoke to Kanzaki sounding annoyed.

"This is ridiculous. Can we quit just glaring at each other like this? I know you are from Necessarius and I can find no reason to overlook you. Given what you have come here to do, you do understand that it is only logical that I kill you, right?"

"Oh, what a coincidence," Kanzaki responded with a thin, thin, thin smile of the sort that was almost never seen on her face.

Her fingers slowly moved for the scabbard of the long sword that lay horizontally on her lap.

"My job here lies elsewhere, but that is no reason for me to overlook members of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight. You are Birdway, the leader of the largest Golden-style magic cabal in London. Do I need to give you time to recall what inhuman things you have done to Necessarius in the past?"

Kanzaki had come there to deal with the magician Orlentz, but she had run across an even more dangerous enemy.

At first, she had thought the Dawn-Colored Sunlight and Orlentz may have been working together, but she had denied that possibility herself. According to prior information, members of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight had attacked the vault containing Orlentz's assets and the plantation for his magical plants. There seemed to be some discord between the magicians. They had come to deal with Orlentz for a different reason than Kanzaki.

But there was absolutely no need for them to cooperate.

That girl was the boss of a magic cabal that was known to cause damage in 10 areas for the sake of a single goal. If Kanzaki took her out there and moved her to the magical prison within the Tower of London, London's…no, the world's safety would increase by a few percentage points.

"Mark." While still sitting down, Birdway held her small hand out toward the man next to her. "She seems to have chosen the kind of option I enjoy. Bring out my symbolic weapon. Let's go with the cup this time. Any stubborn stain can be washed away with water."

In that case, Kanzaki could not just wait for the man to hand her the weapon. She frowned and thought about drawing her sword and striking with the back, but the man named Mark took no action.

Instead of complying with his boss Birdway's command, he shook his head. He showed no sign of handing over the cup.

"I cannot do that, boss."

Birdway frowned with her hand still held out toward Mark and the man looked over toward Kanzaki.

"You should restrain yourself as well, Miss Anglican Saint. I do not know how much of the country's tax money you receive, but I doubt you are a zealous salaryman who is prepared to take us down with you."

Birdway finally looked over toward her subordinate.

She moved only her eyes in his direction and her glare was so fierce it almost seemed audible.

"Don't tell me you think I would be defeated by some woman with huge tits? All she can do in battle is please men as they bounce around."

"Those words alone are enough to warrant me kicking you ass."

It seemed as if the slightest thing would send the two girls at each other's throats, so Mark headed for the door. With the demeanor of someone who was about to simply leave the room, he reached for the doorknob.

Kanzaki and Birdway's expressions quickly changed.

"Wah!! What are you doing!?"

"You fool, don't you know what will happen if you open that!?"

"Have you recalled what it is like outside?" Mark responded and removed his hand from the doorknob.

"Uuh.."

"Uuh..."

The two VIPs looked slightly embarrassed and Mark rubbed his forehead. He too was not exactly pleased with the situation.

"If two monster-class magicians fought in an enclosed area like this, the outer walls would definitely be destroyed from within. If that happened, we would be done for. It may be no problem for you two to survive with zero pressure and no oxygen, but unfortunately, I have not abandoned the laws of physics to that extent. I beg you to not get me wrapped up in this. Do you understand?"

Outside.

They were not in an area protected by Earth's atmosphere.

Only darkness could be seen outside the small window. Kanzaki's long ponytail was naturally floating and Birdway's skirt looked as if it would float up if she was not holding it down.

The two monsters glared at each other, but they did not get up from their seats.

They were both planning to kill the other as soon as they arrived at Orlentz's base, but neither of them said so out loud.

With a dissatisfied look on her face, Birdway clenched her small fist and waved it around in front of her own face.

"You're right, but I can't stand for you to be more right than me. Allow me to let my anger out on you."

“That thought process itself is completely wrong, don’t you thi—waahhhh!?”

She punched Mark with all her strength, but her attempt to brace with her legs failed with no gravity, so it only had the strength of a cat punch. Also, despite being the one throwing the punch, Birdway was sent out of her seat and spinning in midair.

(I just want to leave…)

Kanzaki Kaori let out a rare sigh.

The magic cabal boss who could frighten a crying child into silence had her panties on full display right next to Kanzaki’s face.

Part 2

Quite a bit of time passed.

Due to its location, it was taking a while to reach Orlentz’s base.

An awkward silence filled the small space.

A slight noise was mixed in with the silence.

It was the sound of Birdway, the boss of the magic cabal Dawn-Colored Sunlight, repeatedly pressing the buttons of her folding handheld game system with her slender fingers. She was so focused that she did not seem to notice that she had floated up from her seat and was rotating.

“…My sister is much better at this kind of thing. Hey, Mark. If you’re going to join in for some co-op play, how about you actually help? This boss is unusually tough.”

A sigh came from the man in formal clothing operating a similar game system over by the wall.

“I’ve barely played this before. How about you just ask Miss Patricia to trade you a powerful item?”

“I’d rather play for 100 hours and beat this on my own than bow down to her. …Damn, you suck! Mark, you’re in charge of healing, so quit almost getting killed so quickly!! You’re just putting more of a burden on me when you’re supposed to be assisting me!!”

“Boss, why don’t you stop relying on me and just do this on your own?”

He must have been forced to do that kind of thing quite a bit before because Mark was half in tears. Meanwhile, Birdway hit the pause button and sighed in annoyance. She then glanced over toward Kanzaki who was flipping through a pocket sized Bible in the opposite seat.

“Hey, can you play this? Mark’s reflexes and kinetic vision are completely useless. This is the English version of a game that was really popular in Japan, so you should be familiar with it, right?”

“I have no interest in that kind of thing. I admit that my home country is a major producer of certain types of games, but please do not think that everyone who lives there is an expert in them.”

Kanzaki gave her response without even looking up from her Bible and Birdway clicked her tongue.

“…So you’re just some old woman that can’t even keep up with technology of this level.”

“It looks like someone needs to give you a spanking to teach you some manners, you brat.”

The area was once more filled with a hostile atmosphere and Mark cleared his throat in order to prevent any needless deaths.

“If you insist on making this more complicated, I will vomit in this zero-g space.”

“Kh.”

“Kh.”

The two girls fell silent as if they had been taken hostage.

Once they had relaxed their battle postures, Mark looked over toward Birdway.

“Boss, shouldn’t you start focusing on our job here? I am not sure someone who cannot distinguish between work and play has the qualities needed to be a leader.”

“Hmph. Then let’s head back to the save point. Mark, if we get hit by any more electrical paralysis attacks, just run away rather than healing it.”

The magic cabal boss stared at her portable game system a bit longer, but finally switched it off, folded it in two and tossed it to Mark. She must have reached a stopping point.

“Orlentz is a capricious magician,” Birdway said after sitting back in her seat. She may have been filling the time while her subordinate dealt with the game system. “His reasons are not a desire for eternal life or to bring a loved one back from the dead. He simply enjoys using his own power to toy with others. Stretching someone’s lifespan as if it were a rubber band is nothing more than one of his hobbies.”

“It seems he has put just as much effort into researching how to shorten people’s lives as he has how to lengthen them.”

Kanzaki decided to go along with her in order to kill time. She put the small Bible in her jeans pocket and joined the conversation.

“In other words, he wanted methods of killing people.”

“But he failed in both directions,” said Birdway sounding annoyed. “The results he got were much too small compared to the costs. Even when using a human life, he can only create something less than a human life. This led other researchers to dislike him. He did not construct this over the top base for any grand reason either. He simply lost his place and was driven out here.”

“It seems a few of the techniques that went into constructing this base were in violation of Academy City and the science side’s rules. Thanks to that, I was ordered to resolve this as quickly as possible.”

“And a Saint was deployed for that? Are you cleaning up for Academy City as well as the Anglican Church now? I doubt a bitch who just uses her female body as a weapon will last too long doing that.”

“Will the impudence stop if I tear out your front teeth? Or will I need to tear out your throat, too?”

Since things seemed to be getting complicated again, Mark silently headed for the door. Kanzaki and Birdway frantically started to get along.

“Putting Orlentz’s theory aside for now, do you think eternal life is possible?”

“That is a difficult issue.” Kanzaki worked her head in order to continue the conversation. “There are a few ways for people to create life in whatever form they wish. Similar to clone technology, a physical body that contains life can be created without understanding what exactly ‘life’ is. I actually recently met a magician who had created a special Alfar. But even though this Alfar was created with a fossil at the base, she did not seem to have been created modeled on the fossilized life form.”

“So we can create new life, but we can’t create an identical life to one in the past.”

“Yes, and extending existing life is tricky because the human form it is based on is quite fragile. There is a very slight deviation in the program for cell division. You would not gain eternal life just by infinitely stretching your telomeres. Most likely, your cells would just end up growing cancerous.”

“It seems there is research being carried out into a few methods of transferring a human life into other objects or materials.” Birdway smiled as if she had suddenly recalled something. “I believe it involves taking brain tissue that has been turned to paste and mixing it with lime. It was based on the method of creating the magic bullets used by Celtic gods. They seemed to glow nicely with an odd light, so perhaps they thought a human soul resided within them?”

“Even though no one knows what exactly a soul is?” Kanzaki asked with an expression of disbelief. “In fact, how reliable is the theory that the soul resides in the brain? In Taoist meridians and Yoga meditations, mental stability is gained by passing power through various points in the body.”

“It really is strange. We refine our life force into magical power and cause various phenomena with it, but we cannot touch the soul that is the source of it all.”

“At any rate, might that have the opposite effect?” Kanzaki said, arbitrarily continuing the conversation. “I feel that the human body is the ideal container for the human soul. After all, our bodies have evolved this far to become the most suitable container for our souls. If we force our souls into different containers, wouldn’t that just increase the speed at which the soul deteriorates?”

“Well, even if some magician artificially created a different container, that might be nothing more than the form humanity will take far into the future.”

Birdway stabbed a straw into an orange juice box and caught the liquid in her mouth as it floated around like soap bubbles.

“It seems there are some out there who want to abstractly grasp the direction evolution is taking us so that they can go to heaven without having to wait around for the final judgment.”

“There is no way of proving if that is even possible.” Kanzaki sighed. “And there is already a method in place allowing people to get to heaven by behaving properly throughout their natural lifespans, so that kind of strange originality is not needed. In fact, I get the feeling normal people have much higher odds of getting into heaven than those questionable magicians.”

“Yes, anyone who attempts to get into heaven through some kind of trick has some reason why that is necessary. It’s the same as how a child who can study properly will not rely on trickery to get accepted into a school.”

“And is there really any point to eternal life?” Kanzaki shrugged and then frantically grabbed the back of her seat when the motion almost made her float up into the air. “This planet and this universe will eventually be destroyed. Even if you could have eternal life, the rest of the world would be destroyed around you, so wouldn’t that be something like a personal death? Well, I suppose you would be fine with it if you just loved floating around in an area with no oxygen.”

“You could overcome that by eternally storing the resources of all of humanity and the planet as well as the light and heat energy from the sun. But to do that you would need some method of drawing in the resources from the planet and sun. Well, you could probably manage it if you gathered as many resources as 100 earths,” Birdway arbitrarily calculated.

Of course, it would be easier for humanity to just leave the earth than to gather that much in resources.

“Come to think of it, what was Orlentz’s theory?”

“Oh, c’mon. You didn’t even look into the specialty of the man you were coming to kill?”

“I was only told his theory had already failed. Since I was not given a detailed explanation, they must have determined that it was not important in regards to the battle and that I could win without knowing about it.”

“Saints really do just force everything through with their strength, don’t they?”

Birdway squeezed her juice box sending an orange liquid flying from the straw and into Mark’s mouth next to her.

“Before, you said that this planet and this universe will eventually be destroyed. However, humans have already created something that is similar to a truly eternal life.”

“?”

“Original grimoires.”

Part 3

Birdway must have gotten tired of talking because she took a break there giving no concern for the pace Kanzaki wanted. She may have been fairly selfish due to constantly being surrounded by subordinates as the boss of a magic cabal.

“I’m hungry. I think I’ll eat the emergency rations.”

"…Didn't you just drink some juice?"

Kanzaki looked suspicious, but Birdway showed no sign of caring.

"That isn't going to fill me up. Hey, Mark, bring out the emergency rations. I feel like the caramel ones."

"Okay, okay," Mark said as he reached into his pocket.

He pulled out a type of snack that was sold even in Japan. Subordinate work for a cabal seemed to be difficult in many different ways.

"Boss, as we are currently in zero gravity, please make sure you do not scatter them around. Be careful when you open the bag. If the bag bursts, this area will be filled with these snacks."

"Give it a rest. It'll be fine. Who do you think I am?"

Birdway accepted the bag of snacks with a sigh. She used her small hands to forcefully rip open the top of the bag.

However, they were in zero gravity.

The force she had exerted somehow caused the bag to spin around her hands like a back hip circle. In no time at all, the contents of the bag were set free and spread out throughout the narrow space.

Kanzaki could not remain silent.

"So who am I supposed to think you are now!? You just scattered them everywhere!!"

"This is my farewell gift to you. Be thankful while you eat them."

"I cannot take this anymore. You in the formal clothes…Mark, was it? You are fine with me kicking this brat's ass now, right!?"

"It is true that I would like to give her a slap right now, but if I leave this to you and a large battle breaks out, I have a feeling we will all be sent out into an area with no oxygen or pressure. I beg you to restrain yourself."

As he spoke, Mark was quickly and accurately grabbing the floating snacks and returning them to the bag he had confiscated from Birdway. He seemed to be treating any that had not touched the floor as safe.

Meanwhile, Birdway puffed her cheeks out with dissatisfaction.

"…I've told you before, but that self-important look you have when you spout some logical argument pisses me off to no end."

"Eh? Why are you grabbing my legs, boss!?"

"There has been a bit of research I have wanted to do for a while now. What happens if you perform a giant swing in zero gravity?"

With a shout, Mark started rotating around like a helicopter. This caused the snacks he had finally managed to gather up to scatter about once more which caused Kanzaki to snap.

"You damn brat!! Those things have been getting caught in my hair and it is very annoying!!!!"

"Shut up. Japan customarily gives you your food for free if it has a hair in it, right? Then you're actually quite lucky."

"That is not the same thing as winning something with your popsicle and it has nothing to do with the current situation!!"

"Don't go off on tangents during my independent research, you old hag. Ha ha, this is amazing, Mark. With no gravity, even I can swing a large man around for extended periods of time."

"B-boss? The way my rotation speed keeps rising as time goes by is quite frightening. Could you please forgive me now?"

"Hm? My feet have actually left the ground. I can't brace myself on the ground while in midair, so I actually can't stop."

"Nyaahhh!!"

After that cat-like scream, Mark's upper body collided with the wall of the small area.

Birdway seemed to be satisfied with having played around with him and she grabbed a few snacks floating about and tossed them into her mouth before heading back to her seat.

Kanzaki was dangerously close to reaching for Shichiten Shichitou, but she stopped herself just in time.

She would fight that girl once they arrived at Orlentz's base.

“You said that Orlentz was using Original grimoires…”

“Yes. It is true that, of all the objects in the world, those are the ones that currently seem as if they will last the longest,” Birdway responded cheerfully to Kanzaki’s question.

Grimoires.

A grimoire was a book filled with magical knowledge. The ones known as Originals were especially dangerous. They held such high quality foreign knowledge that they were said to “contaminate” the brain of anyone who read them. In all seriousness, they were able to forcibly demolish a human’s personality.

Normally, the majority of grimoires used for studying were copies. A copy was a grimoire where the purity of its knowledge had been lowered from the Original. Depending on their purpose, there were countless variations in how much of the Original was used within a copy, so there were many different subtypes scattered about like they were some type rogue computer virus.

“Hmm. Come to think of it, that’s pretty risky too,” said Birdway lightly. “Despite the fact that reading an Original is said to destroy your personality, there are people who go out of their way to create copies. Do you know what happens when they do? Towards the end, they seem to faint while they foam at the mouth, but their fingertips continue to move like some kind of machine.”

“Yes, but it seems certain people with a special disposition have a natural mechanism in their brain that defends against the contamination from an Original.”

“Like the Index Librorum Prohibitorum? That too is pretty risky. Just how many defensive mechanisms does she have put inside her? You can call them religious defensive walls all you want, but one wrong step could modify her mind to the point that she loses all her functionality as a human dozens of times over.”

“…That’s true.” Kanzaki Kaori fell silent for a second. “But I am asking you what that has to do with Orlentz’s theory.”

“No one can destroy an Original.” Birdway grabbed a juice box from out of the air and tossed it away again once she realized it was already empty. “An Original is a collection of high purity magical knowledge and each page, topic, and diagram acts like a high level magic circle. You could say it is an autonomous magical device. They gather up the faint power leaking from leylines, amplify it hundreds of times, and create thorough defenses and counter attacks in order to ensure that not even a tiny bit of the knowledge held within itself is destroyed. This effect does not allow any natural weathering of the parchment and prevents it from being destroyed even if all sorts of magicians work together in a group.”

“What would happen to them if they were brought away from the planet? If they were brought well away from the earth where the leylines they draw power from are, that theory could possibly be overturned.”

“I don’t know, but if an Original would lose its power from that, I doubt the defensive functions of the Original would allow you to take it from the earth.”

“So why are you bringing up the Originals anyway? Was a description of eternal life found in one of them?”

“No.” Birdway lightly shook her index finger. “Orlentz turned toward Originals for a much deeper reason than that. He was wondering if the defensive functions of an Original could be applied to the human body.”

“…That’s suicide,” Kanzaki said in a half-groan.

Birdway sighed and said, “It seems there was a method of creating armor in ancient China using bundles of paper. They were made in the same way that cheap bulletproof vests are, but it’s said that they may have been heavier than an actual metal suit of armor. It’s perfect, don’t you think? You just have to switch out the random leaflets with something else and you have the dream come true of Original armor.”

“What was he going to do about the contamination due to the high purity magical knowledge?”

“Don’t ask me.”

“Even expert magicians will get headaches so bad they almost pass out from just a glance at one page. If you had those things surrounding you at all times, you would be destroyed from within long before any outside factor could do anything to you.”

“Hm? Did you forget what you were told in your mission description?” Birdway tapped at her temple with her index finger. “Orlentz’s theory has already failed and is of no use.”

“…”

“And that’s exactly what it is. His theory was destroyed. In a way, he may have overcome the fear of death and is living in a utopia, but it isn’t a way of living I want to think about.”

“I was told Orlentz was continuing his failed research and that there was a danger of him getting many civilians involved.”

“I haven’t heard anything about that. All we know is that this Orlentz went a bit crazy while trying to create his Original armor and started planning to make Original equipment on an even larger scale. He seems to claim that paintings on the walls of ruins being based on religious legends rather than simple designs is proof that they tried to interfere with the king’s body somehow by turning his tomb into an Original grimoire.” Birdway twisted her lips into a mocking smile. “So maybe the base we’re headed to has been turned into a pyramid. I believe there was a custom of burying many commoners alive in the king’s tomb in order to serve him in the afterlife. He may have named it Bifrost or something like that. That’s the rainbow bridge connecting to Valhalla in Norse mythology.”

“…”

Kanzaki Kaori’s eyes narrowed slightly.

Just how much had his theory failed?

However, writing the contents of a grimoire on an even larger object would coincide with the Original grimoire’s drive to spread its knowledge to as many people as possible. It was possible the Original’s protective functions would help Orlentz to a certain extent.

“If the base itself has been turned into armor, this could be quite bad. If it has the same toughness as an Original, none of humanity’s current techniques can destroy it.”

“Theoretically, yes. But I doubt it would be that easy to pull off in reality.”

“Why?”

“None of this was mentioned in your mission description, right? You said they had sent you to the battlefield without telling you anything because they thought you could win without knowing any of it. In other words, your superiors knew that the situation was not that bad.”

“Now that you mention it…”

“Originals are not so easily won over. I can’t see a grimoire’s defensive functions allowing its pages to be split up as would be necessary to create a large scale Original armor.”

“But it is a fact that he has an Original there.” Kanzaki sighed heavily. “Grimoires ally themselves with those who will spread their knowledge and oppose those who will seal it. That means we may have to fight the defensive functions of the Original he has when we enter his base regardless of whether he has created armor out of it or not.”

“Oh? Who says we of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight plan to kindly seal the Originals’ knowledge?”

“You damn brat…”

“Just kidding.” Birdway stuck her tongue out a bit. “We have no real interest in Orlentz’s Original. In fact, we hold a kind of hatred toward the grimoires that contaminate the world. After all, we are technically not a mere magic cabal.”

“?”

“Just so you know, I was not kidding there.”

“Boss,” said Mark as he stared out the small window while standing next to Birdway. “It seems we will be arriving soon. Make your preparations.”

“Will do.”

The magic cabal boss started to stand up from her seat and ended up spinning around in midair the instant she kicked off the ground. She appeared to be enjoying the zero gravity environment, but Mark unassumingly grabbed the edge of her skirt and advised her to not let it spread out.

“Hey, Mark, bring out my symbolic weapon already. The cup. I need to finish things with that giant-chested Saint when we arrive.”

“Kids just say whatever they want, don’t they? …Well, I can understand that you can’t leave this issue of size alone due to our difference in age, but let me be frank with you. They will grow on their own if you give them time, so you don’t need to rush things. …Although there are people whose never grow.”

“…Mark, change of plans. Not only is she treating me like a child, but she’s implicitly declaring her tits the winners, so she must be executed for her crimes. Bring out the magic sword that acts as a conductor’s baton. I’ll take the Hebrew text from the cross medal and draw a sigil to blow her to pieces.”

“I don’t quite get what you’re trying to say, but…cross medal? Can you not draw a magic circle without staring at a diagram of a cross medal? Even though you’re the boss of a Golden-style magic cabal?”

“It must be nice not having to prepare anything because you’re some idiotic muscle-bound woman who can do nothing but swing her sword around and shake her tits. I assume you don’t mind if I call in a bit of power from Michael.”

“Oh, so the young lady has so little confidence in her own abilities that she has to try and look good by borrowing power from one of the major sources.”

The situation seemed to be getting troublesome once more and Mark headed for the door yet again. The two girls turned their gazes in his direction, but…

“No, no.” Mark shook his head. “It seems we have finally arrived.”

Part 4

The magician Orlentz Trice’s preparations were complete.

He already knew that foreign materials had gotten inside the container bringing in resources. He had left it alone because he had no way of destroying just the one container. If he did destroy it, he would temporarily lose the route it was travelling along and would destroy all of the containers on route as well as their contents.

He had expected enemy magicians to show up eventually.

He had prepared for just such an occasion.

An Original grimoire.

His project to split apart the pages and make armor out of it had not been completely successful. However, by putting a metal plate under the large leather book cover, he had tricked the Original’s automatic defensive functions into protecting the book with that thick book cover that could sort of be used as a breastplate.

Orlentz’s base was in an environment that the power from leylines that was the source of Originals’ power had an exceedingly hard time reaching. However, that acted in Orlentz’s favor. Originals were so powerful that Orlentz could not deal with them normally, so it was perfect to have the Original weakened a bit.

He could take out a normal magician.

Equipped with his grimoire, Orlentz stood before the container that had entered his base. His enemies may have been attempting some sort of Trojan horse plan, but they would be the ones who would experience hell.

(I just have to wait for them to come out.)

Orlentz tapped his fingers against the Original equipped on his chest as he thought.

(By defeating them fairly, they cannot complain when I show them despair.)

He heard a clunk as the container door opened.

And…

Orlentz Trice was suddenly blown away by a tremendous beam of light.

Technically, the attack may not have been aimed at Orlentz. After all, beams of light shot out evenly in every direction destroying the outer walls of the container. The container exploded outward as if spreading out like a giant flower. An instant before the explosion, a man in formal clothing could be seen escaping the container with an annoyed look on his face.

Having been knocked away by that one attack, Orlentz was spinning around in the zero gravity environment.

In the center of the explosion, two figures were pressing two types of swords together. One a katana and the other a Western sword.

“What? You didn’t come here champing at the bit to defeat me?” Orlentz barely managed to say as he foamed at the mouth.

The battling girls’ response was an exceedingly simple one.

“Quiet, you damn magician!! I’ll deal with you later!!!!”

“Quiet, you damn magician!! I’ll deal with you later!!!!”

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第⑦巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第七話

救いの行き先

GUNGNIR.

CHAPTER 7

The Destination of Salvation.

GUNGNIR.

Part 1

I will now explain the contents of the requested investigation.

Centered around western Europe, Norse magic cabals have been attacked one after another. Normally, an anti-magician agency like Necessarius would have no reason to save them, but we cannot deny the possibility that the attacker is stealing technical knowledge or spiritual items from the cabal bases and is planning to cause an even greater incident using them.

Please investigate the identity and goal of the attacker and eliminate this attacker if necessary. As previously stated, we have no duty to protect the magic cabals. If you deem it would be an effective strategy, feel free to use them as shields or as bait.

♦

"I see…" said Kanzaki Kaori as she glanced around.

The air smelled of salt water.

The ocean ran up against thick concrete rather than grainy sand. The wind seemed almost sticky as if it had oil mixed in as it oddly coiled about her black hair.

She was in the Belgian harbor area of Ostend.

The tour guide girl's duty was to quickly get the combat magicians to the site and supply them hideouts and the like. According to her, the ocean there was comparatively clean. The crude oil constantly leaking from the paths tankers took and offshore oil platforms had dirtied Europe's oceans.

The area Kanzaki was in was not an industrial area or a fishing harbor.

It was a materials storage area for oil drilling.

It was currently empty, but as new areas were drilled and as other areas dried up, that large area was filled with materials and used as a relay point. However, no other buildings had been built even after that role had ended.

Rusted metal frames and pipes were piled up that were likely remnants from the process of building the oil platform. Also, a prefab office still remained.

Some people had borrowed the area for their own use.

The reason the past tense had to be used was incredibly simple.

“Hyahh. The transportation is complete,” said the tour guide as she jogged over toward Kanzaki. She wiped sweat from her forehead with the expression of someone who had completed a job and flipped through her memo pad. “All 1302 members of the magic cabal Champions from the Sea seem to have been taken out by this attacker. There are piles of bodies. This goes beyond the category of a crime scene. …The witnesses were not very willing to talk about what happened. Well, I don’t think any magician would want to speak of the details of such a crushing defeat.”

“Hhh…” Kanzaki sighed.

A stickier smell struck her nose mixed in with the smell of seawater.

It was the smell of blood.

“How much damage was done?”

“Each arm and leg was broken in two places, five ribs were smashed, the right eye was gouged out, and a quarter of the liver was ruptured. …It was the same for all 1302 of them. The method was very thorough. Someone who could pull this off would have been able to just decapitate them much more easily. I get the feeling whoever it was went to the effort of keeping them alive like this so they would suffer longer.” The tour guide started to sit down on one of the piles of metal beams, but she stopped when she realized it was covered in rust. “Champions from the Sea is a famous Norse cabal. Apparently, plenty of other cabals or magicians would either gain from this or have reason to hold a grudge against them. However, that is a bridge any organization has to cross once they get above a certain size.”

Normally, a magic cabal would form techniques of avoiding that kind of thing.

The cabals that did not think of counter measures tended to get taken out before they got that large.

The tour guide girl bent the edge of a page in her memo pad.

“Did you figure anything out, Kanzaki-san?”

“I was checking the direction of the blood splatter,” she said as she pointed back along the route she had just come along. “The blood flies out in every direction centered on a single line.”

“Um…and that means…?”

“It means the attacker was likely a lone individual rather than a group. It looks as if the magicians of Champions from the Sea all headed out to intercept the attacker who came charging through their base in a straight line…and every last one of them was defeated.”

The tour guide girl looked around seeming to wonder if you could really determine all that from the aftermath, but then she looked confused.

“But…but Champions from the Sea is a fairly famous Norse cabal, right? And they had 1302 magicians here at their base. Could a single person really defeat them?”

“…”

Kanzaki fell silent and then noticed the jeans shop owner approaching from the distance. He was lightly shaking the cell phone in his hand.

“Hey, I’ve gotten everything set up.”

“?”

The tour guide girl looked confused.

Kanzaki sighed.

“…I really do not like having to do this.”

“If the ones being attacked were normal people with no connection to magic, I would outright refuse, but it’s been Those Who Prevent the Extermination of the World Tree, the Iron Stake that Carves Knowledge, and Champions from the Sea. Each of those cabals has a nasty history behind it. The magician attacking them could have that reason even if the cabals have never even spoken to this person.” The shop owner scratched at his head in annoyance. “Honestly, this isn’t the job of a jeans shop owner. Over 1000 expert magicians have been easily torn up in the same method and now you’re saying we should take this monster on with just the three of us? I don’t just have to worry about having workers’ comp for this. I need life insurance.”

The tour guide was completely left behind by that conversation. She tried to reason it out on her own, but finally gave up and just asked.

“Um, what are you talking about?”

“We don’t know who it is, but this attacker has been going around destroying large Norse cabals,” replied the shop owner. “So we just need to get to one of those cabals ahead of time and destroy it ourselves. If we lie in wait at their base, the attacker should eventually show up.”

Part 2

And so Kanzaki and the others headed to the location of the magic cabal the attacker seemed likely to attack next.

The attacker seemed to be targeting Norse cabals all over Western Europe rather than just in Belgium. A map showing the locations of the cabals the attacker had destroyed up to that point made one wonder just how wide a range the person was operating in.

“Can we really figure out what the next cabal is?” asked the tour guide girl from the passenger seat of their rental car.

The jeans shop owner responded from the driver’s seat.

“There are all sorts of Norse cabals. They have different histories, number of members, affluence, strength, magical techniques, types of spiritual items, and amounts of knowledge or books in their possession. Necessarius takes all that information together and computes a level of danger.”

“?”

“This attacker has been destroying cabals in order from the highest level of danger on down. Of course, the lower cabals are trembling in fear knowing they can’t handle an enemy that took out even stronger cabals. The attacker could be doing this in order to take out the most dangerous enemies while they still have strength to spare or they might just enjoy making other tremble in fear.”

The tour guide’s face paled.

“U-um…Kanzaki-san said the attacker is most likely a single person rather than a group…”

“True.”

“So this person is going around destroying Norse cabals starting with the most dangerous ones? All alone!? How strong is this monster!?”

“Nn, well, it could be…”

Just as the shop owner started speaking, Kanzaki leaned forward from the backseat.

“We are almost there.”

“Got it. Hm…this might be what it feels like for the pilot of a bomber,” the shop owner muttered as he parked the small car on the edge of the road.

They were not stupid enough to park their car right in front of the enemy’s base.

“Well, it’s all up to you now, Kanzaki. Just go and kill everyone in Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword.”

“…I will only be knocking them unconscious. They are guilty of many things, so we will be taking them in. Make the proper preparations for the recovery team’s arrival.”

Kanzaki opened the back door and got out of the car while muttering what were probably complaints about the strategy they were using.

Her body suddenly disappeared into the darkness with a sound like a whistle.

The tour guide looked off after Kanzaki for a bit (despite not knowing which direction she had disappeared into) before removing her seatbelt and pulling a sandwich out of the paper carton on her lap.

“Will she really be okay? Even if she is a Saint, she is up against a magic cabal with thousands of members. Back with the marine prison, you two said 500 prisoners was dangerous…”

“This cabal specializes in large scale spiritual items, so she’ll be fine if she can attack them before they can make any preparations. In fact, ending this without killing them will be more difficult. But given her personality, I doubt she’ll kill any of them,” the shop owner said. “Really, I’m more worried about my own life. I’m being flooded with complaints from around the world about how I’m not shipping anything out.”

“Oh, what ever happened with that Saten girl?”

“I haven’t been able to do my work at all because you two keep dragging me around the world!! What am I supposed to do!? How long ago did she make her order!? And I can’t even explain why I can’t ship anything out!!”

The shop owner tore at his hair and it seemed he was giving no serious thought to the possibility of Kanzaki losing.

The tour guide started eating her sandwich that had cabbage, corned beef, and mayonnaise and looked a bit uncertain.

“Won’t we end up getting wrapped up in some unexpected crisis if you blindly rely on her like this? There is no guarantee that Kanzaki can win in every single situation.”

“True, but I doubt there will be any problems here.”

“?”

“If the attacker can do it, then so can our Kanzaki.”

“Eh? What do you mean…?”

“I mean,” the shop owner said as he grabbed a fish paste sandwich from the paper carton on the tour guide’s lap, “that our enemy this time may also be a Saint.”

At that exact moment, a tremendous explosion could be heard. The car rattled, the tour guide panicked, and the shop owner grabbed the carton of sandwiches that almost fell from her lap.

His expression did not change.

“That’s a cabal base for you. That probably neutralized the people clearing field. I hope they can manage to play it off as a gas explosion.”

“W-was that…Kanzaki?”

The tour guide’s face stiffened and she heard Kanzaki’s voice.

It was coming from a communications spiritual item.

“I have completed the negotiations for the ‘eviction’. I held back, but you should send the recovery team here just in case.”

“That was easier than expected, don’t you think?”

“…”

“But I guess it really isn’t too surprising,” said the shop owner with a grin. “If this hadn’t happened, a mysterious attacker would have come and mercilessly crushed them. Since you were offering only a moderate defeat, some of them probably happily let you beat them.”

“I asked a few of them if they had any idea who the attacker might be, but I did not get any good answers. However, it did not seem that they truly did not know anything.”

“So I guess we really have no choice but to lie in wait and find out when this attacker actually shows up,” said the shop owner.

However, Kanzaki seemed hesitant to mention something.

“Also…when I first entered their base, they seemed to mistake me for someone else.”

“Ahn?”

“When they first saw me, they thought that ‘she’ had come. They called me ‘Brunhild, the mixed one’. So who did they mistake me for?”

Part 3

The magic cabal Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword’s base was a giant wooden ship. However, it was not floating in any water. A harbor was located on an artificial waterway that cut deeply into the land. The over 30 meter long sailing ship located in that flat asphalt area was the cabal’s base. The bottom of the boat curved up in a half circle shape, so the gap between it and the ground was filled with dozens of wooden pillars.

“This is the old style of doing things,” muttered the jeans shop owner upon seeing it. “So this is like a fancy castle filled with tradition? With such a showy base, they’ll lose all their assets at once if the place gets searched.”

The tour guide frowned as she followed him.

“You mean as opposed to the modern magic cabals that split their assets up among apartments and RVs in order to minimize the losses if any one place is searched? But that way just has no spectacle.”

Since Kanzaki Kaori had already “eliminated” the magicians, no one else was in the area.

Kanzaki was in the process of stretching long wires from the center of the giant sailing ship to the surrounding streetlights and small harbor control buildings.

“I would like to set up a people clearing field before the battle starts, but then the attacker…this Brunhild might realize we are lying in wait.”

“Don’t you just need to set it up so it’s too late by the time she notices it?”

The shop owner’s response was rather vague because he did not have a combat role.

The tour guide girl then took a sip of coffee out of a cylindrical bottle that seemed to be from a chain store.

“Norse mythology is fairly well known in name, but modern people have surprisingly little contact with it.”

“?”

Kanzaki turned in the girl’s direction.

She went on to say, “You do not hear much about large showy temples being left over like with Christianity or Greek mythology. I get the feeling that not many people would be able to explain how the religion controlled the people like the Pope and priests of other religions. …In fact, normal people would probably have a hard time explaining the stories of the mythology like how the world began and how it would end in the mythology.” The tour guide lightly shook her bottle of coffee. “But normal people will have at least heard of the names of things like rune magic or seiðr magic even if they do not know the details of their use. People that never open any religious texts will naturally learn the names of at least Odin and Thor.”

It did not have the same sense of being foreign as Mayan or Aztec culture.

Yet it was not so familiar that the symbols of the religion could be easily brought to mind like with Christianity.

“I don’t know quite how to explain it…The general impression of Norse mythology seems somehow inconsistent. It is hard to tell even if it is seen as major or minor.”

In a way, that could possibly be used to describe the current attacker, Brunhild, as well.

A near yet distant magician.

They could imagine some of the broad details which made her seem very real, but they could not see the specifics which made her seem even more ominous.

“Regardless of what it was in the past, Norse mythology is currently one of the highest ranking religions when it comes to slowly permeating cultures with its knowledge rather than directly ruling cultures,” said the shop owner as he leaned up against a street light. “Basically, no one is shouting at people telling them to believe in it. Instead, everyone ends up knowing about it without anyone doing anything in particular. Well, it is easy to use for fantasy settings, so I won’t deny that it has spread through various types of entertainment.”

“Historically, it seems most Norse cultures were overtaken by the spread of Christianity,” said Kanzaki joining in the conversation after having finished laying out the wires.

The tour guide looked over at her.

“Um, he said that this attacker, Brunhild, might be a Saint like you.”

“Yes.” Kanzaki nodded. “If you recall, I investigated the base of Champions from the Sea in that Belgian harbor city. While I did, I naturally ended up thinking that I would cut through an enemy base in the same way.”

“Uehh…” groaned the tour guide.

Since Kanzaki had actually succeeded in an attack using the same method, it seemed likely that Brunhild had a similar level of physical strength.

But that meant…

“We do not know who will win this time!”

“It is not just this time,” Kanzaki replied immediately. “There is never any guarantee of victory. Bringing the fight to a situation you specialize in is more important than who your enemy is. In fact, changing what you are doing to match your enemy will increase the danger. No can perfectly wield their power in a true battle.”

“There doesn’t seem to be all that much I can use,” said the shop owner as he checked on the wires spread out through the area. “I’ve added in some of my sewing to prevent the side effects of the people clearing field from being detected, but that’s all I can do. This is going to be Saint vs. Saint. We can’t do much to provide backup in a battle between two monsters running around faster than the speed of sound.”

“Yes, this will be enough. You two should head back to the car.”

“Eh? Eh?”

The tour guide girl looked confused and the shop owner waved at her.

“She’s saying we need to leave before Brunhild, this rumored genocidal attacker, gets here. If we stay, we’ll just end up being blow away by the aftereffects of some attack or another.”

That was the logical thing to do, but the tour guide still seemed hesitant.

“Just because this is a fight between two Saints doesn’t mean the odds are at an even 50/50,” the shop owner said lightly.

“?”

“Normally, the person making a surprise attack has better odds than the one caught by surprise. Brunhild thinks that she is the one making the surprise attack, but Kanzaki can raise her odds of victory by quite a bit by reversing those roles and attacking while Brunhild is still confused.”

“Umm, so…”

“This is not a sport with set rules. It’s only natural to adjust things to your advantage as much as you can before fighting. You only challenge someone once your preparations are complete. Even if their abilities are the same, Kanzaki will not lose to Brunhild in this environment.”

Just as the shop owner said that with a smile…

“Oh? I don’t know who you are, but you certainly have a poor view of me.”

It was an odd female voice.

Each word and each syllable clearly entered their heads, but they could not tell what direction it was coming from or from how far away.

Some kind of trick was being used.

Why would she be using a trick like that?

The answer was simple.

(…Not good… A long distance attack!?)

“Get down!! Hurry!!”

Kanzaki yelled out, but their opponent did not give them enough time.

The first shot came.

Actually, it was less of a shot and more of a bombardment.

An explosive noise split the air.

Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword’s base was an over 30 meter long ship set up on land. A one meter shell struck its wooden side. That one attack smashed the wood and bent the side in like a crater. Splinters flew through the air and the entire ship shook. The amount of destruction was not normal.

That ship was not simply made of wood. The outer wall had been fortified with various defensive spells and barriers and yet it had been smashed with that one attack.

The attacker, Brunhild, had not overlooked the shop owner or the tour guide. She had truly tried to crush her enemies in that attack.

Her measurements had been off due to the wires spread out through the area.

Originally, Kanzaki had been intending to use them for the people clearing field, but she instead forcibly pulled on the bundle of wires in her hand. As a result, the wires sliced straight through the streetlights they were connected to so they would block the trajectory of the shell.

The shell hit one of the streetlights which slightly altered its trajectory. This prevented any of them from being turned into a pile of flesh.

But…

"That," said the directionless female voice, "will not work again."

Another giant shell came flying toward Kanzaki and the others. It was likely simply being thrown with brute force.

But Kanzaki's eyes had grown used to it.

By making it past the first shot, she had gained the important information of which direction Brunhild was firing from. She also knew how quickly the shells flew. With that much information, she could deal with them as long as she focused.

Kanzaki's right hand naturally reached for the sword hanging at her waist.

The two meter sword was named Shichiten Shichitou.

With her strength as a Saint and her magic skill, it was perfectly possible for her to slice the shells in two as they headed her way.

However…

"…!?"

Just before she pulled the blade from its scabbard, Kanzaki's body stiffened.

If she had not stopped herself, she might have sliced the shell in two and then guarded against a possible counterattack.

She had seen what the shell actually was.

It was the body of a Those who Know the Rune of the God's Sword magician who she had defeated and the recovery team had supposedly taken away.

The man had his arms and legs broken, one eye gouged out, and a severely bruised side. The "shell" that came flying toward her was a partially balled up human body. According to the tour guide girl's reports, all of the past victims had been defeated in the exact same way.

She could not slice that in two.

Kanzaki just barely managed to stop the movement of the hand reaching for her sword and she avoided it by bending backward.

“Gwaaaaahhhh!!”

It slightly grazed her as it passed.

That was enough to knock her body back quite a bit and cause an unpleasant groaning sound come from within her body. Having missed its target, the shell once more struck the giant ship. It held just as much destructive power as the previous one.

Kanzaki looked over toward the jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl.

“You two need to get behind the ship!! Take a path that protects you from the bombardment and get away from—!!”

“Should you really be worrying about others right now?” said the female voice drowning her out.

This time, no shell came.

Instead, the attacker herself charged toward Kanzaki with tremendous speed. She just barely remained below the speed of sound, but not because she lacked the strength to exceed it. She was making sure not to create an unnecessary shockwave that would give her enemy extra information.

A Saint.

The theory that the attacker might be one had been more or less proven with that bombardment and overwhelming speed. Brunhild’s capacity was about equal to Kanzaki’s.

But…

If they were both Saints, there was not enough of a gap between their strengths for Kanzaki to defeat her in a single strike.

“!!”

“!?”

Just as Kanzaki drew her long sword, a heavy shock ran up the blade. It was due to the blow from Brunhild’s blade that approached silently at high speed.

Brunhild, the attacker, was a girl with long blonde hair and white skin. She seemed to be about the same age as Kanzaki. She wore a hat with decorative feathers in it, a dress that came down to just above her knees, and men's pants. She also had protectors covering her elbows and knees and bulletproof vest covering her chest.

She gave an odd impression.

Each piece of clothing had nothing in common with the others. Wearing thick men's pants beneath a women's dress was strange enough, but the protectors on her joints were likely the type worn while roller skating. And the bulletproof vest was on a level where it seemed unlikely any clothing would match it.

And yet…

As a whole, it all had an odd sense of unity. It looked as if she had created the same silhouette as Medieval European armor using modern materials.

(A magical symbol…)

Kanzaki pressed her sword as far forward as she could and looked at Brunhild's sword. It was an exceedingly wide double-edged sword that was about 1.5 meters long. The point was not all that sharp, but that was likely because it was meant to crush an enemy wearing metal armor.

It was a Western sword called a claymore.

The giant sword would have looked out of place in any modern scene, but it seemed appropriate when held by Brunhild with her armor-like silhouette. The claymore may have been the core of the magical symbol Brunhild was using her entire body to display.

Compared to Kanzaki's Shichiten Shichitou which was developed based on a Japanese katana, the claymore was much wilder. It was so huge that it seemed like an image of the stagnation of military arts.

It so heavy and huge that it could not be controlled finely enough to make precise slices.

On the other hand, it had the destructive power needed to provide a fatal blow to an enemy by simply swinging it down and not thinking about the movement of one's feet or the usage of one's muscles.

"Oh?" said Brunhild as she used both hands to hold that weapon that was so large it lost all flavor. "I was wondering who was interfering, but I guess it was another Saint."

A great scraping noise rang out.

It was the sound of the claymore being pulled back to create a gap of a few centimeters between the two blades and then being swung in a curving arc toward Kanzaki once it was free.

It was not simply being swung down with no real thought being put into it.

It was a refined attack.

The strike was fast, sharp, and heavy enough to be referred to in that way. Kanzaki just barely managed to catch it on her long sword. Even a Saint on Kanzaki's level just barely managed. Immediately after Kanzaki realized that fact, Brunhild began sending blow after blow with her claymore.

The exchange caused a great din with slight intervals like machine gun fire and sent orange sparks flying.

She was not just fast.

She was not just raining blows down.

Each attack was thought out and tried to slip through Kanzaki's defenses and the blows against her katana held a murderous intent that wore on one's mind. Kanzaki's eyes grew sharp as she felt that intent and swung her blade repeatedly at the same speed.

Brunhild did not just force her way through using her abilities as a Saint.

She could only produce such deadly blows because she had not been content with that and had trained and trained to bring herself beyond that.

In other words…

"So we're the same."

When Kanzaki heard Brunhild say that, she lost it.

"Like hell we are!! What happened to Those who Know the Rune of the God's Sword and the Necessarius recovery team that was taking care of them!?"

"Oh." Brunhild answered Kanzaki's question in a tone that showed she did not especially care. "So they were from the Anglican Church. Sorry about that. I thought they were their reinforcements, so I took care of them."

"…!!"

Kanzaki's speed increased explosively.

But Brunhild was able to keep up. Being one of the fewer than 20 Saints in the world was no longer much of an advantage in that fight.

Then something changed.

The orange sparks that were produced as they wielded their weapons at supersonic speeds suddenly expanded oddly. The sound of steel clashing with steel also reverberated in a distorted way for an instant.

“Tch.”

Brunhild jumped back seeming to have realized something.

Kanzaki glared at her holding her sword out at the ready and Brunhild switched to a one-handed grip on her claymore and looked down at it.

The thick, wide blade was made to slice an enemy in two, armor and all.

The blade had chipped in places. Like a poor-quality comb, it had thin, irregularly spaced gaps a few centimeters deep running along it. During their exchange of blows, Kanzaki’s katana had eaten into the claymore.

“I’ve heard that Japanese katanas have the durability needed to function both as a sword and a shield, but this is something more. You have some kind of spell embedded in the blade. I’m using attack spells in conjunction with my blade, but it looks like I’m at the disadvantage here.”

“Yuisen. It is a spell that theoretically has the ability to slice a monotheistic angel in two. It is not something I like to turn on humans.”

“I see.”

Brunhild’s stance changed.

There was no major visible change, but the murderous intent she had been sending straight forward receded. She had changed to a defensive stance or perhaps one for retreat. She may have been thinking of leaving while the damage was minimal. Brunhild had completely switched out her strategy.

“Are you going to flee?”

“Don’t be mistaken. My objective is not you. I only made contact because I wanted to know who Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword’s reinforcements were…but this does not seem to be an issue. I can still continue my plan.”

“Your plan? Why are you attacking Norse cabals?”

“For fun and for profit.”

Brunhild smiled.

It held so much malice and hate that it almost did not seem right to refer to it as a “smile”.

“If you want to know what my objective is, you should ask them rather than me. Ask those magicians who pretended to be the victims while you were so kind as to protect them. I’m sure you’ll figure it out if you just focus on the terms Valkyrie and ‘mixed one’.”

“!!”

As Brunhild started to turn away, Kanzaki lowered her hips slightly and focused on Shichiten Shichitou. She had been on top in the exchange of blows with the claymore. If she pushed forward, she could break the claymore.

But…

“Is that really such a good idea?” asked Brunhild even though she did not seem too interested. “Our rampage had a bit of a side effect. This ridiculous cabal’s base looks like it’s about to collapse.”

A chill ran down Kanzaki’s spine.

Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword’s base was a giant sailing ship brought up on land. The space between the ground and the half-circle bottom of the ship was filled with dozens of wooden pillars.

A few of the wooden pillars had been broken by the shockwaves of Kanzaki and Brunhild’s battle.

As the load was focused in one direction, the remaining pillars were breaking one after another. Once it passed a certain point, the over 30 meter long ship would obey the law of gravity with nothing to support it.

In other words, it would roll over.

And the jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl were still hiding behind it.

“Dammit!!” Kanzaki cursed and ran toward her colleagues before the giant ship completely tilted over.

As she made that move, she knew instinctually that Brunhild would now slip through her fingers.

She would use that slight time lag to get the distance needed to flee. A conceited smile appeared on her face.

“I see no reason that we must fight, but I will have no choice if you get in the way of my plan,” she said to Kanzaki before leaving. “If you do…I will see you again upon the completion of Gungnir.”

Part 4

The attacker, Brunhild, had escaped.

Fortunately, the jeans shop owner and the tour guide girl were safe, but the cabal members who had been used as shells were in critical condition. It seemed the other cabal members and the Necessarius recovery team had been discovered on the roof of a building about 700 meters from the harbor. They had all received heavy wounds leaving them near death.

Kanzaki Kaori headed from the harbor back to the rental car.

She had no intention of getting right back inside the cramped vehicle. She was simply feeling that dispirited. Brunhild’s method of fighting by using human bodies as projectiles could wear down a human mind just by watching.

Kanzaki sat on the hood of the car and heard the shop owner speak to her.

“Found her.”

He was holding a cell phone.

He seemed to have been speaking with someone over it.

“She is Brunhild Eiktobel, a Saint from Finland. She has a proper entry in the Anglican Church’s database and the British Library.”

“Well, there are fewer than 20 Saints in the world. It is not that hard to make a list of all of them.”

It may seem surprising, but very few Saints were proper members of a Christian organization like Kanzaki was.

Most of the time, the Saint was simply so strong he or she felt no need to become the member of an organization. To put it bluntly, they held the strength needed to rival an organization all on their own.

Instead of trying to force those Saints into giving in, organizations like the Anglican Church would make sure they knew where they were and what they were doing but leave them alone so long as they posed no threat.

Brunhild must have been one of those Saints.

“Saints are a Christian thing, right?” asked the tour guide sounding confused. “Why can a Norse magician like Brunhild use the power of a Saint?”

“A Saint gains their power from bodily characteristics that they have from birth. There is nothing strange about someone from a Norse culture like Brunhild being one.”

“It seems Brunhild was originally part of a pure Norse cabal. Apparently, she used that kind of spell and did not use her Christian side as a Saint.”

“A cabal…” Kanzaki muttered.

The shop owner shrugged.

“It seems it wasn’t that much of a cabal. It only had 20 or 30 people and Brunhild was the only one with any real skill. They did nothing to stand out and it seems their goal was just to continue living in the traditional way.”

“In that case, we should investigate that cabal,” Kanzaki suggested, but she felt an inconsistency between the goal of protecting a traditional life and the actions and battle ability of Brunhild. “An order from that cabal might be behind Brunhild’s actions.”

“I doubt it,” the shop owner immediately replied. “It was destroyed 5 years ago. Brunhild was the only survivor.”

♦

Kanzaki and the others arrived at a nearby church.

It looked like the world famous Roman Catholic style, but the inside was set up in the Anglican style. It was a Necessarius hideout. The victims of Brunhild’s attack were gathered inside. They were not in a condition where they could be treated in a normal hospital.

That many people were able to fit in the church because the space inside had been altered magically.

A nun wearing a nurse cap bowed upon seeing Kanzaki.

“Thank you for all your hard work. Are you here to question them?”

“Yes, if there is one who has relatively light injuries…”

“None of them have injuries any lighter or heavier than any of the others.” The nun shook her head. “They all received the exact same amount of damage. This level of accuracy makes the attacker seem like a human factory or something. It gives me the image of people being carried down a conveyer belt and accurately crushed. I just cannot believe that a human could deal out such even damage in the middle of a fierce battle. Surely it would have been a hundred times easier to just kill them.”

Kanzaki understood the situation, but she could not turn back.

She changed the way she gave her request.

“Then may I speak with one of them who seems like he would have the most information?”

“Yes, but I doubt any of them can tell you anything beyond screaming.”

The nun started slowly walking within the church as if leading Kanzaki and the others. They followed her.

“It seems Brunhild added in a magical trick after crushing her targets’ bodies with simple physical force.”

“A trick…?”

“Their wounds will not heal.” The nun sighed. “Something has been set up which is interfering with their natural healing abilities and with any recovery magic. In other words, their broken arms will remain broken until we either remove Brunhild’s spell or defeat her directly.”

“Since she uses Norse magic, did she carve runes to do it? You might be able to eliminate the effects by eliminating them,” said the shop owner, but the nun’s expression did not change.

They must have already thought of that.

“How are we supposed to eliminate runes that are carved inside their lungs? It might be possible to switch out the entire organ with someone else’s, but…”

“Uehh…” said the tour guide girl with an unpleasant expression.

The nun in the nurse cap arrived before a door and moved to the side to let Kanzaki in.

“Go right in. Call me if you need anything else.”

“Thank you.”

Kanzaki nodded and opened the door without knocking.

She did not give even the slightest courtesy to the people within.

It was unclear what the original purpose of the room was. The square room was large, but it had no furniture whatsoever. Mattresses were placed directly on the stone floor and the magicians Brunhild had attacked were lying atop them. About 10 such magicians were in that large room.

Multiple eyes glared in Kanzaki’s direction.

However, those 10 magicians all had their arms, legs, one eye, and a portion of an organ crushed, so none of them actually drew back or charged at her.

Kanzaki glanced around and settled her gaze on a young man.

“I’ll be blunt. Tell me everything you know about Brunhild Eiktobel.”

As expected, she received no answer.

Silence continued for a while.

The tour guide girl uneasily moved her gaze between Kanzaki and the young man and the jeans shop owner sighed out of annoyance. The shop owner seemed to be saying they should just give up and use the man as bait for Brunhild.

Kanzaki remained silent.

That silence applied more pressure than any shout could have.

While still lying on the mattress, the young man spoke to Kanzaki as if the words were being forced out of him.

“…Do you…really think…I have any…obligation to tell you…anything?”

His will alone was strong.

His were words of refusal, but if he truly felt that way, he would not have needed to speak at all.

Kanzaki noted that and continued the conversation.

“I am simply saying that taking you to the Tower of London to be tortured would be a lot of effort I would rather not be forced to take. Actually, it might be faster to just take you to the next cabal Brunhild will attack.”

“Tch,” the young man clicked his tongue. “You’ve got…quite a way of putting things. Cough. I take it…you understand the situation…to a certain extent.”

“Yes, we know that, as a group, you drove Brunhild Eiktobel’s small cabal to destruction five years ago.”

Kanzaki’s manner of speaking was slightly different from before due to that information.

The young man sighed.

“So I guess…you’ve also investigated…into the whole Hel thing…”

“No.” Kanzaki shook her head. “That is why I want you to tell me everything you know.”

“…If you don’t know…it’s better that it stays that way.” The young man did not look too good, but he managed a smile. “I’d rather die…than speak of that.”

“So you really have no intention of speaking… But is that really a good idea?” responded Kanzaki. “Brunhild said she would see me again when she had completed Gungnir.”

“…!!”

The young man’s body stiffened, but Kanzaki continued regardless.

“That is Odin’s spear in Norse mythology. I do not know to what Brunhild was referring with that name, but it does not seem that her revenge will end with just a few broken bones. You may remain silent if you wish, but you will likely meet a much more painful fate if Brunhild’s plan continues.”

“…Dammit…”

“How many times am I going to have to tell you? Tell me everything you know. Of course, you may remain silent if you do not mind having every Norse cabal in western Europe slaughtered.”

The young man remained silent, but only for a few seconds.

“She is Hel, a mixed one,” the young man finally said.

His tone held a bit of scorn toward Brunhild.

“That means…exactly what you think it would… Brunhild Eiktobel is…not a mere Saint.”

“She is not…a mere Saint?” muttered Kanzaki and the young man nodded slightly.

"…She is…a Valkyrie." His wounds must have been painful because he groaned as he spoke. "The Christian Church has people…with special characteristics…who are known as Saints. Cough. In the same way…there are special existences…in Norse mythology…known as Valkyries."

That term appeared in various places in the mythology.

There were various theories as to the identity and origin of them, but one of those theories said a Valkyrie was not a pure god like Odin or Thor. If a human girl desired battle more than anything else and Odin answered that prayer, that girl would become a Valkyrie. In other words, an existence known as a Valkyrie that exceeded human knowledge existed at the extremes of humanity.

As a being that connected human to god, a Valkyrie could possibly be seen as analogous to an angel or a Saint. Due to this, there was plenty of magic dealing with Valkyries.

There were methods of accurately calling in a Valkyrie and methods of having a Valkyrie take warriors' souls to Valhalla, the hall of the gods.

There were methods of obtaining a portion of their power by creating the weapons and tools of a Valkyrie.

And there were also methods of creating a Valkyrie by human means.

In fact, rune magic was the representative magic of Norse mythology and several methods of using runes were said to have been given to humanity by Valkyries. That was just how deeply related Norse magic was to the concept of Valkyries.

"Many different methods…cough…of creating a Valkyrie have been conceived of… But a process added on afterwards…can only do so much. In the end…you need the proper bodily characteristics…from the moment you were born. Similar to the proper skeletal structure needed to be a Chinese Xian…you need the proper characteristics on the skeletal and organic level…"

"And Brunhild matches those characteristics…?"

Kanzaki frowned.

So was the Brunhild she had fought at Those who Know the Rune of the God's Sword's base a Valkyrie rather than a Saint?

Or had she been using the powers of both at the same time?

The meaning of the term "mixed one" slowly grew clear to Kanzaki.

"What does this nature of Brunhild's have to do with all this?"

"…Five years ago…" the young man said. "Those Who Prevent the Extermination of the World Tree, the Iron Stake that Carves Knowledge, Champions from the Sea, Those who Know the Rune of the God's Sword, and the Hammer that Tempers Gold within the Earth…attacked Brunhild Eiktobel. …There was a fear…that Hel could destroy the very format…cough…of Norse magic…"

"Destroy the format…?"

"Brunhild…does not use pure Norse magic…" he said. "And…she was just…too powerful. People choose…the most powerful and most efficient things…while creating their knowledge…and techniques. Cough. People would…take Brunhild into account…and aim to be a magician…like her. If everyone headed in that direction…it was possible that…pure Norse magic would go on the decline."

It was true that Brunhild's magic would have an indelible tint of Christianity to it if she had the characteristics of both a Saint and a Valkyrie. If everyone looked up to her and followed in her footsteps, the question of what would become of Norse magic was a valid one.

Christian culture would begin to eat into Norse culture.

Those five Norse cabals had refused to let that happen.

They had refused to allow Brunhild to become a person other magicians would look up to.

That was why they had attacked.

It had been a fight to protect their own culture.

Hel, the mixed one.

In Norse mythology, that was the name of the daughter born of Loki, a traitorous god, and a giantess who opposed the gods. Those five cabals had given Brunhild Eiktobel the name of the ruler of the cold underworld and then attacked her.

However…

"In the end…"

Kanzaki Kaori's voice was even colder than it had been before.

She had naturally clenched her fist and that grip had grown tighter with time.

"In the end, wasn't that nothing more than jealousy? You could not stand the thought of everyone gathering around Brunhild rather than joining your cabals. Wasn't that all it was?"

“No… We were…protecting Norse culture. …We were acting out of justice. Just like the family of Loki…she was a monster that would…harm this world itself!!”

“Brunhild Eiktobel was part of a small cabal with only 20 or 30 people!! That cabal was not a group carrying out large magical activities. They just wanted to protect their traditional way of living!! What you did was gather the power of the five largest cabals and attack them!! You brought enough strength to start a true war against people who did not even have proper weapons!!”

“She is…the repulsive Hel!! Cough cough!! It’s her fault…for being a Saint!! If she truly didn’t want to be attacked like that…she should not have been…a Saint in the first place!!”

His words were completely selfish.

One was a Saint due to bodily characteristics one had from birth. It was an issue of having characteristics similar to the Christian Son of God or not. What that young man was saying was on the same level as justifying an attack because his opponent had a certain hair color, skin color, or congenital disease.

How had Brunhild Eiktobel felt?

Because of something she had been forced to possess from birth, she had been completely alienated, hated, and envied by others. She had no plot or grand ambitions. She had simply wanted to protect her peaceful life in one corner of the world, but some complete strangers had decided she was dangerous and had taken that life from her.

The shop owner had said her cabal had been destroyed and that Brunhild had been the sole survivor.

Why had she alone survived?

Had it been because of her natural ability?

If so, how much had that made her curse her own ability?

(…)

Kanzaki Kaori had taken an especially heavy shock from the fact that merely being a Saint had been seen as an issue that had destroyed people’s lives.

She was not completely overjoyed at the fact that she was a Saint, but she was still Christian. A Saint held a special position in the Christian Church, so she had still viewed it as a blessing somewhere in her heart.

But…

What if someone from a religion completely different from Christianity was given the qualities of a Saint?

That power would be nothing more than a foreign substance.

No matter how much she said she was on their side, Brunhild would never truly be a part of them due to that foreign substance. Because those bodily characteristics had been a part of her from birth, she could not eliminate them easily. No matter how much she hated being Hel and no matter what danger it brought the few people who would accept her, she could not get rid of what made her a Saint.

As a result, what Brunhild had was…

"We…did nothing…wrong!! We fought…to protect…our history…our culture…our way of life!! Brunhild Eiktobel's mere existence…distorted Norse mythology!! It is wrong…to let her name be known! It isn't right…for her to belong to a cabal! If that Hel rises up from the shadows of history again…we will strike her down…as many times as it takes!! We will destroy it all…and shove her back…into the depths of history!! That is…out duty! This fight is necessary…to protect Norse mythology!!"

The young man's shouts echoed vainly.

None of his words got through to Kanzaki.

In fact, the way he spoke made one think it was better to not have his words get through.

And then…

"Is that all? Isn't there something you haven't told them yet, Setrua?"

They suddenly heard a female voice.

At the same time, the young man's mouth was suddenly blocked. The female voice was coming from his mouth. The man's mouth was being used to produce that female voice.

"It did not end with the attack 5 years ago. What happened afterwards? What about when you dug up the graves I made for those children and fed their bodies to wolves? What about when you attacked small Norse cabal after small Norse cabal to make sure they all felt so threatened that they would not help me? What about when you killed those children with no connection to magic just because they spoke to me as I lay collapsed on the ground?"

"Brunhild Eiktobel!!" Kanzaki cried out.

Each word she spoke must have put a great burden on the young man's body because his body convulsed and his eyes opened as wide as they could.

(Brunhild carved runes within their lungs to prevent the damage from being healed.)

A whistle-like sound leaked out and the young man's mouth was moved even more forcibly.

"You attacked that cabal in order to eliminate me, but I was the sole survivor. You did not achieve your goal, so of course the attacks did not end there! Right?"

Brunhild continued to ask him questions, but the man had no way of responding.

Or perhaps they were in a situation where the two of them could exchange information within their brains.

"You hid these facts, Setrua. You hid the fact that you continually chased after me even after destroying that cabal and the fact that you captured me half a year ago. And let's not forget what happened then."

"...!?"

The young man then greatly resisted the control Brunhild had over his vocal organs. However, he only managed to cause his body to tremble unnaturally. He was unable to utter even a single word.

Kanzaki turned around toward the shop owner and the tour guide.

"Dammit. Call one of the healing nuns!! I am going to pass my wires into his body and try to cut off this interference from Brunhild!!"

"It won't work. Unless you perform a lung transplant, you can't take control of him from me. Or do you plan on attacking me from a far?"

Brunhild's words held great scorn.

Her tone held no hesitation toward harming another human being.

That Valkyrie had wished for nothing beyond living a peaceful life in a small village. Just how far had she been twisted?

"Setrua, I just finished destroying the Hammer that Tempers Gold within the Earth. I have now crushed all five cabals. My true purpose begins now. Like the hands of a clock, I am now inexorably approaching you as you lie their unmoving. Once I arrive, I will act true to the name of Hel that you forced upon me by sending each and every one of you to the underworld."

Hatred, hatred, hatred, and more hatred.

Brunhild's words tore into those they were directed at with nothing but their hatred.

Hel.

That female voice continued to send scorn upon them like the queen of the underworld.

"Yes, I will soon complete Gungnir. And that is no metaphor. I will literally have the spear of Gungnir. I'm sure you know what a weapon of the gods signifies in Norse mythology."

The Lightning God Thor had the hammer Mjölnir that represented the destructive power of lightning.

The weapon of a Norse god was the power of that god itself. The gods could wield their power because they possessed their weapons. There were stories of gods temporarily losing their powers due to losing their weapon or having it stolen.

In other words…

A human who created a weapon of the gods and could properly wield its power would theoretically be able to control the very power of that god.

"It would be difficult for a normal human," Brunhild continued.

And this was Gungnir.

That spear belonged to Odin, the greatest of the Norse gods.

"But I am not a normal human."

If she had created that…

If Brunhild Eiktobel held that…

"I am the mix of Valkyrie and Saint that you detest so much. Since I am mixed like this, I hold possibilities that would be unthinkable for a normal human."

What she referred to would likely be more difficult for the pure Norse magician that young man was than for a Christian magician like Kanzaki. In fact, his face paled to an unbelievable extent upon hearing the words that came from his own mouth.

"Magicians these days cower in fear at just an angel or two. There is no way they can oppose the greatest god of a worldwide polytheistic religion. …I will change everything. This does not affect only Norse mythology. I will carry out my objectives even if I have to utterly destroy the magic side to do it."

The young man's mouth flapped opened and closed.

He seemed to be trying to say something.

Kanzaki Kaori's expression grew even grimmer as she read his lips.

And then…

"Setrua, I will let you choose." Brunhild's words grew even louder. "I did not simply kill you all because I want to give you the kind of truly hellish pain that does not yet exist in this world once I complete Gungnir. However, I am merciful. Just this once, I will give you the chance to bite your own tongue."

The young man's head tilted backwards.

Just before he tried to bite down as hard as he could on his tongue, Kanzaki stuck the side of her hand into his mouth. Immediately afterwards, dark red blood flowed from his mouth.

He had not bitten through his tongue.

He had bitten into Kanzaki's hand with terrible strength.

"Kh…!!"

Just as Kanzaki's expression was about to distort in pain, the shop owner started moving.

As the young man lay on his back convulsing, the shop owner kicked the side of his jaw hard.

His jaw must have dislocated. Strength left his mouth and Kanzaki pulled her hand out.

But her expression was not one of relief.

"He's seriously injured!! How could you do that to someone who was only being controlled!?"

"Don't force this to look nicer than it is!! I'm sure you noticed too! Brunhild wasn't controlling him at the end there. She purposely removed her control over him to let him choose! She did it because that way holds more despair and therefore is more 'fun'!!"

Just then, the tour guide showed up with a nun. They immediately started treating him, but it was unclear how much it would help him. He was so completely overcome with fear that he had unhesitatingly tried to bite through his own tongue. His body was greatly injured but his mind was in tatters.

“Kanzaki!” shouted the shop owner. “Use your wires on his body! Do a trace on the construction of the spell!! We might still be able to find Brunhild’s location!!”

“That will get in the way of his treatment!! I can’t do tha—!”

“So you would rather see her create even more victims!?”

(Dammit…)

Kanzaki clenched her fist so tightly blood came from her wound.

She had no choice but to use someone’s body as they were on the verge of death for her own reasons.

That was how vital it was to head after Brunhild Eiktobel.

If she lost her there, Brunhild would likely create even more victims.

She had no time for hesitation.

And…

“Dammmmmmiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiittttttttttttttttt!!”

Her seven wires sliced through the air. Those narrow wires accurately bound the young man’s body in an instant.

A portion of the flow of magic power that had controlled his body from within flowed into the wires. From that, Kanzaki grasped Brunhild’s general distance and direction.

“20 kilometers northwest!! She is travelling at high speed even now. She is interfering on her end, so I will lose the trace in a few seconds!!”

“At that distance, it would probably be faster for you to run there rather than use the car,” the shop owner muttered. “Go, Kanzaki!! Either way, we can’t help much in a battle between Saints. Get this over with and then come back!!”

She did not have to be told twice.

Kanzaki jumped straight out the window rather than leaving through the door. The instant her low trajectory jump brought her outside, she unleashed her leg strength all at once sending her after Brunhild faster than the speed of sound.

An explosive noise rang out far behind her.

As Kanzaki ran, she recalled what the young man had been desperately trying to get across with just the movements of his tongue after his jaw had been dislocated.

(…The Final Rune.)

The Norse god Odin was also known as a magician. Via a few ceremonies, he had acquired the magical knowledge that became the source of his great strength.

The most famous of those were the means of using the 18 varieties of runes.

Most of them had clear effects such as stopping the motion of a flying arrow or checking to see if a cup had poison in it, but there was one that no one knew the purpose of.

The Final Rune.

Only Odin knew the purpose of or the method of using that legendary piece of magic.

However, it was based on runes which could be used by humans and gods alike, so Brunhild would be able to use it if she learned how. She would be able to use the magic that became the mysterious source of power for the god who held the greatest power and knowledge even among the Norse gods.

Most likely, completing that rune would give true power to Gungnir.

And Brunhild would complete her revenge once she had that spear. She would wield that god-like power and send those magicians of Norse cabals to a hell humans could normally never experience.

But…

(Is that really it…?)

As she pursued her enemy at high speed, Kanzaki realized something did not make sense.

Even without waiting for Gungnir's completion, Brunhild Eiktobel had easily overpowered those five cabals. If she wanted to kill them, she could have done so when she attacked and there were plenty of other ways to torture them before killing them.

Kanzaki had the feeling Brunhild was hiding something.

What was the true goal of that Valkyrie who was called Hel.

(…At any rate, I cannot allow her to complete Gungnir.)

Kanzaki stared straight forward once more.

She was close to her target.

(If Brunhild is going to cause even more damage, I must destroy that spear directly!!)

♦

A Christian Saint hurried toward a Norse Valkyrie.

The spear that held the greatest destructive power of a certain mythology would soon be completed.

With the Final Rune that only Odin should know, the disaster would begin.

アニメ『とある科学の超電磁砲（レールガン）』第⑧巻初回特典付録

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）SS

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

第八話

秘されし文字を伝える者

VALKYRIE.

CHAPTER 8

The One who Teaches the Secret Rune.

VALKYRIE.

Part 1

The contents of the requested investigation…have not been established.

Your target…has not been established.

In this emergency situation, everyone involved should use their own judgment.

♦

Half a year ago.

Brunhild Eiktobel's power had a periodic irregularity similar to the waxing and waning of the moon.

She held both the qualities of a Christian Saint and a Norse Valkyrie. However, she could not wield both powers at the same time. The two powers were in opposition to each other, so they weakened each other rather than multiplying her overall strength.

When her power as a Saint was strongest, her power as a Valkyrie was reduced to zero.

When her power as a Valkyrie was strongest, her power as a Saint was reduced to zero.

Using the moon comparison, those extremes would be like the full moon and new moon.

That was not a real issue.

Either way, Brunhild had quite a bit of power at her disposal. She could use her power as a Saint to run faster than the speed of sound and she could use her power as a Valkyrie to bend a tanker in two with a single punch. Even if she made an enemy of a normal magic cabal, she could annihilate it on her own.

The problem was the time halfway in between.

In the moon illustration, that would be the time of a half moon.

At that time her powers as a Saint and a Valkyrie were exactly equal. When the scales were perfectly level like that, she lost both powers. In other words, Brunhild Eiktobel was no different from a normal person for a few days every three months.

It had been as if they had aimed for that time.

However, she did not think the enemy Norse cabal understood her nature that well. Whether it was a coincidence or intentional, they had still attacked during that weak time.

They had ganged up on her, beaten her until almost her entire body was torn up, dragged her across the ground, and thrown her into a cold cell. Her arms and legs had been bound by thick chains and she was not even allowed to lie down to sleep.

She had guessed the cabal had not killed her right away because they wanted something.

They loathed the fact that she held the qualities of both a Saint and a Valkyrie but they also were unwilling to let a rare specimen like a Valkyrie slip from their fingers.

Brunhild Eiktobel had been a special existence from the moment she had been born.

Without thinking anything of it, she had stocked up a few spells that produced special effects that no normal person would be able to produce.

The people from the cabal wanted those.

Instead of a discussion, they used torture.

They liked primitive methods. They used metal tools to constrict her fingers until the bones were on the verge of being crushed. They tightened ropes around her chest to obstruct her diaphragm and drive her toward suffocation. They cut shallowly into her skin and rubbed salt in the wounds. They forced her to drink giant buckets of water to pain her internal organs. They fixed her in balled up postures that applied such a severe burden to her muscles that they were brought near the point of snapping.

They were not simply trying to gather information. They had a dark joy behind it all.

Their faces had started as nothing but smooth and expressionless, but as time went by, their expressions changed to twisted smiles as if screws holding their faces in place were becoming looser and looser.

Because Brunhild Eiktobel was such a special existence, the people of the cabal did not even see her as a fellow human. And Brunhild could not be killed easily.

There were two set feature to their torture.

They never passed beyond the level where the wounds would never heal such as severing a finger or gouging out an eyeball.

And they never used any sexual torture such as rape.

This was not a decision they made based on Brunhild's rights as a human. If that was their reason, they would not have tortured her at all.

It was because if they passed the point of no return, Brunhild would "give up". Someone who had nothing left to lose would not tell them anything. She would no longer care about the pain. To prevent that from happening, the people from the cabal had not gone beyond that final line. It was as if they were continually lightly prodding her with the tip of a knife.

No part of her body was not bruised and discolored.

She had lost the ability to properly distinguish between her emotions.

The torture started in the morning and ended at night.

Her cell had no window, so she had no way of telling if the sun was up or not, but she did not lose her standard daily rhythm. This was because she was brought food at the same two times every day.

Morning and night.

Right before the torture began and right after it ended.

Food was always brought to Brunhild Eiktobel's cell at those two times. She was given hard bread, bland soup, and a few vegetables. Brunhild had almost laughed at the fact that they had made sure to give her a proper balance of nutrition.

The person who brought her the food was always the same.

It was a boy of about 10.

He wore plain clothes and had bruises on his cheeks. And he had an iron shackle on his right ankle. From that, Brunhild deduced that he must have been someone or someone related to someone in similar circumstances to herself.

She had been cautious at first.

However, that boy had been the only person she could have an actual conversation with. Brunhild had spoken with the boy, but this had not been because she had trusted him. It had mostly been a means of regaining mental stability she had lost while being continually tortured.

It had started as just a few words.

That had eventually led to something that exceeded the bare minimum of what was needed.

Finally, it reached a point where a smile actually formed on her face as she spoke with him. It was a very awkward smile that was nothing more than a slight distortion of her lips that had been hardened with the blood from her wounds, but Brunhild finally smiled of her own will once more.

It was a strange feeling.

The reasoning that it was simply a means of healing her worn down mind may have been nothing but an excuse. She may have simply been thankful that there was someone who would treat her like a normal human being.

But then one day when the boy brought in the food as usual…

“I’m sorry.”

The boy of only about 10 began his confession.

He had been under orders from the people of the magic cabal to become an emotional support for Brunhild. As her mind weakened over the long period of torture, the effects of the physical pain would lessen. By having the boy periodically move Brunhild’s heart, her heart would not grow numb. That way, their torture would be even more effective.

Someone who has grown accustomed to the heat will not feel pain even when touching hot water.

However, if someone sticks their hand into hot water after soaking it in ice water, it will feel even hotter than usual.

The boy had been given the role of the “refreshing ice water”.

His role had been to make sure Brunhild Eiktobel would suffer even more.

“I’m sorry.”

The boy’s confession continued.

He had cursed his powerlessness that left him only able to follow the cabal’s orders, but at the same time, a part of him had felt superior to her as he saw her trust him unconditionally. With each action he took and each thing he said, her heart had opened up as if following a flow chart. That had made him incredibly, incredibly happy.

"…"

She felt no hatred.

In the end, hadn't that boy simply wanted to get along with Brunhild? Hadn't he just wanted to laugh with her? The ones at fault were the people from the magic cabal that had trampled on those feelings and made him follow their orders. Why was that boy the one who had to lower his head to her?

She felt as if something deep in her heart moved.

Up until then, she had given up on everything. The cabal that had wished for nothing beyond a peaceful life had been utterly destroyed five years before and she had been constantly pursued afterwards. It was as if the gears of her heart had become oddly blocked obstructing their movement. She felt as if the sand clogging them up had been cleared away.

She would save that boy.

She would fight once more for that reason.

After that, Brunhild changed. Even as she was tortured, she worked to store as much power within her body as she could. She counted the days from the timing of her meals and waited for the power residing within her to reach its peak.

Her power changed like the waxing and waning of the moon.

In numbers, it was about a three month cycle.

Over that time, the power balance between her Saint and Valkyrie powers changed.

Her power would tip to the Valkyrie side in just a few more days. If that power reached its absolute peak, she could break her chains, break out of the cell, and escape. She could reach out a saving hand toward that boy who had been suffering alone for so long and return him to a warm life. That clearly gave her a reason to live for. At that time, Brunhild had to have been stronger than anyone else in the world.

But then the boy did not show up at the usual meal time. Instead, one of the magicians who harmed her day in and day out came. A very bad feeling welled up within her. The magician held a single letter in his hand. The tiny letter was stained with something dark red.

"That damn kid killed himself."

The words did not properly enter her mind.

She did not understand what he meant. She thought it was a bad joke. She thought they had to have distanced the boy from her and then told her that lie in order to move her heart.

But it seemed the magician had no such plan.

He grinned and started opening the dark red-stained letter.

“It seems conversing with you to get your heart moving again left him with quite a bit of guilt. When we came to check on him this morning, he was collapsed on the floor.”

To make her suffer…

To pain her…

To mock her…

To feel superior to her…

The magician dropped the dark red-stained letter on the floor in front of Brunhild. The letter floated down where she could read it. The messy, shakily-written words made their way into her head.

It said: *I’m sorry I couldn’t save you.*

Something snapped inside Brunhild at that point. Literally. She had the superhuman power of a Valkyrie. Her rage sent that power erupting to the surface. The muscles of her face moved in distorted ways and ripped her skin in all directions.

It was as if many different mouths were opening on that one face.

It was not because she hated the magicians.

It was not because she loathed the constant torture.

What burned her heart the most was that the boy who had been driven to suicide had been more worried about her rather than himself in the end.

“Ee!”

She heard the magician scream.

Brunhild Eiktobel ignored him.

She moved her arms.

That was all it took to violently tear apart the thick chains that had been binding her body for so long. The metal rings making up the chains flew away as if they had been fired from a gun. Some became embedded in the walls and some slammed mercilessly into the magician's head. Blood splattered on Brunhild's hair and cheeks, but her expression remained frozen.

Silence fell over the room.

She then uttered a cry that seemed as if it would continue to the farthest reaches of the world. She blew away the thick door blocking the exit with a single fist and headed out into a passageway of that cabal's facility.

Everything was blown away.

The power that had been stored up to save a single small life was unleashed for a completely different reason.

Part 2

Brunhild slowly opened her eyes.

She was in a parched area. The area had originally been a mineral water plant, but a dam upstream had greatly changed the flow of water leaving nothing but dry land. The company had completely abandoned the plant so there was nothing but a giant concrete box and the framework remaining.

Wind and rain had destroyed the roof of the building, so the starlight fell within it.

However, the area did not have a cold, dark atmosphere.

It was quite the opposite.

The wild night scenery was hot and humid and it had an odd brightness to it. An orange light as if from a blast furnace leaked out from below. White steam poured from the ground in places and a sulfur-like smell hung over the area.

It would normally have been reminiscent of lava.

However, that made no sense.

There was no active volcano in the vicinity. The area was not one with hot springs and the conditions for lava to erupt directly from the ground had not been met.

Nevertheless, the ground was cracked and a glow as if from molten iron poured from within.

It was as if the master of that space was displaying his anger.

Brunhild stood amid it all.

Religious symbols were not embedded about her. She was not surrounded by clearly strange objects.

Brunhild did not need such things.

She…or rather, Norse mythology was not a religion that took control like Christianity. It was a religion that permeated everything so that everyone knew of it without realizing it.

"…Hm."

She had bruises on the index and middle fingers of her right hand as if a thin fishing line had been wrapped around them. That was the remains of Kanzaki Kaori's trace. Brunhild slowly poured power into her hand to control the circulation of blood causing the bruises to gradually vanish.

"I may have played around a bit too much."

Immediately after she muttered that, she heard the trees around the plant swaying.

No, technically, she was hearing something more like the manmade wind caused in a subway station when the train passed by in the tunnel. Such a large amount of kinetic energy was approaching that the surrounding scenery was shaken by it.

In response to that great presence, Brunhild grabbed the spear that was propped up against a nearby wall.

The weapon was 3 meters long.

However, it was not clear if the weapon should truly be called a "spear".

Its silhouette was made up of an ash tree's branch at the center with many pieces of steel complexly intertwined around it. In some ways it was like the tip of a spear, but the characteristics of a sword, an ax, and other weapons could be glimpsed as well. The weapon seemed like some kind of trompe l'oeil. It pulsated like a living being and wrapped around the ash branch like a snake.

The legendary spear was even then growing as it approached completion.

When it was truly complete, someone who could draw out all of its power would be able to carry out things on the level of the greatest god of one mythology.

The quality of the spear and the skill to use it.

With either of those things missing, it would lose all meaning, but Brunhild Eiktobel was sure of her ability. As a Valkyrie, she could…only she could…wield Gungnir.

In Norse mythology, the power of the gods was collected in the weapons and tools they held.

Someone who held the spear of Odin, the greatest god, and could draw out all of the spear's power would be able to freely use the great power that made Odin a god.

With that, she could destroy and create at her leisure.

With such a great power, she could destroy the power balance of the entire magic side just by existing. Magicians who knew of magic power and created it within their bodies might even have their physical bodies torn to pieces by the massive pressure of Gungnir.

(So what?)

Even if she destroyed all magic cultures or even caused great damage to the planet Earth itself, she had an objective she had to complete.

She had to make her plan one where even saving a certain boy was realistically achievable.

Brunhild smiled thinly as she gripped the tree branch that felt warm like human skin.

(Its maximum output is at about 70%.)

She did not have any time left to think.

The massive presence belonged to another Saint who was mercilessly attacking.

With one strike, the thick concrete wall to the side was smashed to pieces.

It went beyond the level of a hole being blown in the wall.

The wall stretched for 50 meters, but its entire length was knocked into the building like a tsunami had hit. The shock of the blow was so great that the entire plant tilted to the side with its lost support. Luckily, the weathered plant no longer had a roof. Otherwise, the concrete roof would have rained down from above.

No special magic had been activated.

A simple kick from a Saint had caused all that damage to the building.

But the assault did not end there.

Brunhild immediately brought up the spear, but before the dust and concrete could reach her, some glittering objects shot ahead of all the wreckage.

They were seven wires.

Nanasen.

In the instant Brunhild had been distracted, the multiple wires had accurately spread out around her. There were no pulleys or anything set up to string up the wires. It was the same as the ribbon in rhythmic gymnastics. By using the power of one's wrists to give slight shaking vibrations to the wires, they could be made to stay seemingly stationary in one place.

(She's sealing my escape...!?)

Brunhild was only given the instant it took to think that.

Immediately afterwards, the seven wires assaulted her from all direction like a three dimensional guillotine. Brunhild gave up on trying to forcibly push back the deadly grid of blades with the spear. She twisted her body through the air, spun around a few times, and slipped through the slight spaces between the wires.

She had not been unsure of the spear's abilities.

The reason Brunhild had not used the spear was simple.

(She still hasn't started her true attack.)

Just before her feet landed back on the ground, a chill ran down her spine.

She could see two eyes accurately glaring at her beyond the dust.

(If I use my trump card here, I won't be able to deal with her true attack when it comes!!)

For the next few seconds, all sound disappeared.

The dust was split down the center. In a straight line from the center, something quickly approached like an arrow. Brunhild realized that it was a human form and stabbed her spear into the cracked ground. Earth's gravity was just too weak so she could not wait to land naturally. She used her weapon to forcibly stop her motion and then land on the ground as if swinging her body around with the spear at the center.

That was when the attacker's "true attack" came.

Its form was the sword.

Its meaning was death.

The attacker used the iai technique of slicing with the same motion as drawing the sword. The trajectory of the blade naturally made a horizontal half circle. This trajectory was corrected slightly upwards so that it accurately aimed for Brunhild's neck.

Brunhild did not hesitate.

She had no reason to hold back any longer.

She grabbed the spear stuck in the ground with both hands and pulled it toward herself like it was a giant lever. The principle of leverage caused the tip of the spear to be lifted up from the ground scattering concrete fragments around as it did. The tip shot up straight for the attacker.

The two weapons crossed paths.

A high pitched clang exploded out.

Brunhild's spear accurately struck the attacker's sword. Since the attacker's sword was making a horizontal half circle, the side of the blade was pointed down. Neither weapon was destroyed and sparks flew out.

It was like a small scale explosion.

Brunhild and the attacker both drew back a few meters.

For those two, that distance might as well have been inches away. They could hit and kill with any attack from that distance.

In that situation, even messing up the timing of one's breathing could lead to death, but Brunhild smiled.

"You certainly seem different from before."

She adjusted her grip on the spear.

Unlike the claymore from before, Gungnir would not be destroyed. The spell in Kanzaki's blade, Yuisen, held the destructive power needed to cut down a monotheistic angel, but Brunhild's spear had been able to match it. That must have been because it held the power of the strongest Norse god due to the Final Rune.

"I guess this was too much for a little lady like you."

"Your fun has gone too far." The attacker's face, Kanzaki Kaori's face, was expressionless. "I will ensure that you atone for those sins."

Part 3

Kanzaki Kaori observed Brunhild.

Her most notable characteristic was the spear she held in both hands. Many different types of weapons old, new, East, and West were referred to as “spears”, but Brunhild held one that was about 3 meters long. It was larger than the type used in close quarters combat, but it was a bit too small to be used on horseback or on a ship.

It was most likely made of ash wood and carefully heat treated carbon steel. The metal blades complexly coiled around the wooden handle like snakes and had clearly been made so they could be used to stab or even crush like a hammer using its weight. At first glance, it may have seemed as if it could do anything, but there was a risk of its advantages cancelling each other out.

Simply put, it was not quite suited toward any one use.

However, that also made it difficult to determine what its purpose was or what strategy she would use it for. If you were led astray by the apparent distance to her and the length of the weapon, you would be taken out in a single strike. That danger was hidden within that weapon.

Brunhild had named that spiritual item Gungnir and a battle-hardened magician from Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword had tried to bite his own tongue upon hearing that name. It was a mystery what effects it held, but it was clearly bad news.

Kanzaki could not decide if she should continue analyzing it in order to give herself as much of an advantage as possible or if she should not analyze it at all so as not to be led astray. Brunhild spoke to her sounding as if she had not put much thought into her own decision.

“If you had waited just a bit longer, I wouldn’t have had to show you Gungnir in this awkward form. You didn’t have to bother with that trace. I was headed there before long.”

The spear held by Odin, the greatest god of Norse mythology.

The symbol of the power held by Odin, the strongest god of war in the mythology.

Of course, a normal magician would not have been able to create something like that and they would not have been able to completely draw out its power even if it had been dropped into their lap. However, Brunhild had something that completely overturned that expectation.

Was it simply because she held the rare abilities of a Valkyrie?

Or…

“The Final Rune,” muttered Kanzaki and Brunhild’s eyebrows moved slightly. “The most secret of runes that only Odin knows how to write or what it does. Did you bring Gungnir into this world by carving that rune into it?”

“I see. It seems the Anglican Church at least does its homework.” Brunhild brushed her fingers along the ash handle. “But you have that a bit wrong. I did not carve the Final Rune into the spear. That is not the place I needed to carve it.”

“…”

There were a few different processes for rune magic. You decided what effects you wanted, you chose the most suitable rune or runes for that, you chose the location that would best draw out the effects of the runes, you actually carved the runes, you offered a prayer to the gods that ruled over each rune or magic used, you checked on the effects, and you destroyed the runes you had carved in order to end the effects.

As no one knew what the Final Rune did, no one knew where to carve it to have the greatest effect. But according to Brunhild, the Final Rune was not something to be carved on a weapon.

(But then where…?)

Kanzaki started looking around the plant, but she saw nothing. She had a feeling it was nearby, but she doubted Brunhild would start a battle if the rune could be easily destroyed as a result.

“Don’t go all on the defensive like that. This might actually be a good opportunity for you,” said Brunhild lightly to Kanzaki who had taken a wary stance. Brunhild’s expression made it clear she saw no chance of it actually being a good opportunity for her opponent. “The Final Rune is much more complex than I thought it would be. Well, the rune itself is made up of straight lines just like the others, but the dying of the grooves in the carved rune is very complex. I’ve set it up to finish with automatic writing, but it’ll still take a few more hours. Currently, its max output is only at about 70%.”

“…”

“And my nature as a Christian Saint is constantly interrupting. Ha ha, look at this. I’m trying to put together the spiritual item as Gungnir, but the next thing I know, the magical symbols for the Christian Lance of Longinus are mixed in. Thanks to that, the purity has been diminished and wielding the power as I wish is a bit difficult.”

As if in response, the three meter lance pulsated creepily. The complex metal blades twisted around grinding like gears causing the silhouette to be changing even then.

That may have been Gungnir approaching its true form as the Final Rune approached completion.

Or it may have been a sudden unexpected change caused by the influence of the Christian Lance of Longinus.

Either way, it was not normal.

Brunhild saw the Lance of Longinus as an interference that lowered the Norse purity, but that would still be quite a threat were it to evolve further in that direction.

“What will you do? I may still be at a level where I can be killed by a human,” she asked.

Kanzaki responded to her question with a question of her own.

“Did you go to all this effort to obtain the power of Odin because you wished for revenge that greatly?”

“…”

“If you wanted to kill them, you could have done so at any time. If you wanted to make them suffer, you had countless means at your disposal. Did you just want to carry out your revenge using the power of one of the gods they believed in?”

“What ridiculous sentimentality.”

Brunhild slightly moved the tip of the spear.

It was now pointed even more accurately at one of Kanzaki’s vital points.

“I may have lost everything, but there is still one thing I want to carry through to the end.”

The conversation ended there.

But Kanzaki Kaori’s action had been decided from the beginning.

Her body charged forward with a burst of energy.

In that instant, Kanzaki Kaori’s body disappeared from Brunhild’s field of vision. It was not merely an issue of speed. With her weapon held forward, her arms and the weapon blocked a portion of her vision. Kanzaki had accurately used that “blind spot in the front” in order to charge straight toward her enemy.

But Brunhild was not sliced in two.

Her weapon moved as if it had naturally jumped up. Sword and spear. The two weapons clashed, a tremendous shockwave was produced, and the Saint and Valkyrie glared at extreme close range.

“I’m not quite sure how to judge that decision.” said Brunhild as they pushed their weapons together. “Were you aware that Gungnir is actually a throwing spear? I guess that would be why you are trying to bring this into a close range battle.”

Suddenly, Kanzaki’s hands holding the 2 meter Shichiten Shichitou started to shake. No, it was not her hands that were shaking. Gungnir was vibrating as it pressed against the sword.

“Did you know that Balmung, the sword said to be one of the strongest items in human possession, was destroyed in a single strike from Gungnir?”

“…!?”

(Weapon destruction!!)

Kanzaki immediately created a diversion with her seven wires and jumped back in the slight opening it created. Barely an instant after Kanzaki jumped back, Brunhild’s spear pulsated. Steel panels intertwining around the center ash wood handle created the silhouette of the spear. As those steel panels complexly fit together like some strange kind of gears, the surface of the spear moved as if it were made of slithering snakes.

If Shichiten Shichitou had remained in contact with the spear for a bit longer, it would have been caught within the steel panel blades and crushed as if by a vise until it broke.

However, Kanzaki did not have time for a sigh of relief.

She had only put about 5 meters between them. Brunhild continued speaking.

“Did you know that Gungnir is the strongest throwing spear? If it is thrown, it will surly pierce its target, not even the toughest weapon can intercept it, and the thrown spear will surely return to Odin. …Isn’t that just ridiculous? Since people kept adding more and more wonderful abilities to it, it lost its true substance as a spear.”

Brunhild changed her stance.

There was no obvious change. Her center of gravity merely lowered slightly. That small motion completely changed the impression she gave. It looked similar to someone holding a machine gun at their waist.

“So I had a thought. Odin’s spear is not an incomprehensible weapon made up of a jumble of abilities. All its abilities have a unified system behind them.”

A throwing spear.

A projectile weapon.

Kanzaki's breathing changed to a method used to focus one's mind to the limit. Should she put some distance between them before the spear was thrown or should she approach and finish things before Brunhild had a chance to throw the spear? As that decision approached Kanzaki, Brunhild spoke calmly.

"Yes. Gungnir is a weapon that can completely control all kinds of weather."

A flash of light filled the entire plant with the color white.

It was due to a lightning strike.

The storm of light rained down from 3500 meters above and mercilessly pierced through Kanzaki's body vertically.

It was not the normal color of lightning.

The light was a pure, holy white.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

She had not been able to construct any kind of defensive magic.

It had not been an issue of time. The completely unexpected attack had come from a mental blind spot.

The powerful electrical current expanded and contracted her muscles causing her body to bend unnaturally backwards like a bow. To her credit, that one strike was not enough to knock her unconscious.

Brunhild was not surprised.

She knew just how tough the physical body of a Saint was.

In fact, the Valkyrie did not let up on her attack and began a powerful follow-up attack.

"The number two Norse god, Thor, is said to have originally ruled over all of agriculture rather than just lightning. Lightning is merely one of the weather phenomena that relate to agriculture. …In that case, the number one god, Odin, should have abilities that interfere with Earth's environment at an even greater level."

She tilted the spear up above her head as she held it down at her waist and spun it lightly around once as if in a military exercise.

Immediately afterwards, molten rock surged up.

The sublime magma glowed a brilliant white that was never seen in the natural world.

The calamity that was her strike was the same as divine punishment.

Brunhild had originally split open the earth to carry out some objective, but now pure white lava erupted from within. That lava followed the motions of her spear and headed for Kanzaki like a giant liquid hammer.

That time, Kanzaki managed to react in time.

Kanzaki greatly evaded the lava hammer in an instant and charged toward Brunhild Eiktobel's blind spot, swinging her blade for the Valkyrie's back.

"Surely hitting when thrown, not being stoppable by any weapon, and the rest of the jumble of abilities were nothing more than manifestations of people's fear of natural disasters. Lightning, tornados, volcanic eruptions, floods, earthquakes… Cultures around the world have interpreted those natural disasters as the wrath or weapons of the gods."

She did not turn around.

The ground split open and this time a large amount of water erupted from within.

A holy light glowed from within that water of destruction.

Intense water pressure pressed against Kanzaki's blade which unnaturally distorted its trajectory. Just as it passed above Brunhild's head, she forcefully spun around and hit Kanzaki with a horizontal swipe of her spear.

Kanzaki could not use her sword for defense.

Kanzaki made that judgment in an instant and actually stepped further forward. In doing so, she made sure that the handle hit her side rather than the tip of the steel blade. With a great noise, her body was blown to the side, but it was not sliced in two.

Kanzaki rolled along in order to put some distance between them and Brunhild made no attempt to fill that gap.

She merely pressed the tip of the spear against the floor.

Immediately afterwards, something like white ice spread across the floor with the tip of the spear at the center. No, it was salt. The huge amount of salt covered the ground in no time at all and altered the soil.

Salt damage.

Kanzaki sensed that her feet would become stuck to the ground at that rate, so she jumped 10 meters straight up into the air. The roof of the plant had been destroyed, but a passageway still existed on the second floor. She quickly landed on that area.

That was 70% output.

Due to the Christian symbols mixed in, the pure Norse power could not be used.

How much power would it have if Gungnir was 100% complete and Brunhild Eiktobel managed to eliminate the impurities and become a perfect Valkyrie?

(The Final Rune…)

That was the key.

The power Brunhild was wielding greatly exceeded the amount a normal magician could. The legend of legends that was the rune only Odin knew had to be supporting that.

Kanzaki had to destroy it.

Once Brunhild completed Gungnir, it was likely that no one would be able to stop her. The massacre that she called revenge would continue eternally.

(If I only knew what form it had…)

“Do you want to see it?” asked Brunhild as if she had read Kanzaki’s mind.

She removed one hand from the spear and pointed the palm toward Kanzaki. Something was there. It was a small wooden board. And something was carved into it. It seemed to be written in dark red blood.

It leapt into Kanzaki Kaori’s vision.

And…

Part 4

Kanzaki heard a sound like the beating of huge drums.

It was the sound of her own footsteps.

She was not within the half-destroyed plant she had been in just before. The night wind caressed her cheek. She had left the building.

She was still within the grounds of the mineral water building, but she had made it over 500 meters from where she had been fighting before.

She had a headache.

It was not a normal headache. The intense pain felt like a spike was being driven through her skull from the inside and it simply would not go away.

Kanzaki was supposed to be pursuing Brunhild. Carelessly leaving and allowing Brunhild to escape would be very bad. She knew that, but Kanzaki's entire body begged for at least a short break if not a retreat. That was how bad the pain was.

"Kh…"

However, it could have been worse.

Her defensive instincts had immediately kicked in. She had not chosen to flee as part of a plan or a strategy. Her flight was simply her instinct as an intelligent life form. If she had not fled, Kanzaki's mind might have been destroyed back in that plant.

Brunhild Eiktobel had not unleashed any kind of special attack.

It had been the rune.

It had been that single rune displayed in a dark red liquid on the wooden board in the Valkyrie's palm.

That headache had exploded into her head in the instant the rune had entered her vision.

(This headache…)

She recognized it.

She gritted her teeth, used a mediation breathing method, and otherwise tried to mentally distance herself from the pain.

(This is just like from an Original grimoire…)

Grimoires with knowledge of too great a purity known as Originals could shatter a human's mind just by being seen. It may have been similar to creating instability over an entire computer system by forcibly running a program meant for a different OS.

But…

"Just one rune…?" Kanzaki muttered as she grimaced at the throbbing pain of the headache. "Just one rune caused this much contamination…?"

Even an Original grimoire would take a few hundred pages to produce information on that level. The Final Rune Brunhild had shown her rivaled an entire Original with just one character. It was not normal. There was no way it was normal. That alone proved just how much magical value was held in that single rune.

"…Kanzaki…"

Suddenly, she heard the jeans shop owner's voice coming from the cell phone in her pocket.

Technically, it was coming from the communications spiritual item stuck to the cell phone.

"Can you hear me, Kanzaki? Hey, don't tell me you were taken out by Brunhild."

"I am still alive." Kanzaki wiped sweat from her forehead and took long, deep breaths. "I just caught a glimpse of what seems to be Brunhild's Final Rune and my brain was very nearly contaminated. The Final Rune is carved on a wooden board in Brunhild's hand. She may be using it to raise her own divinity."

"That's different from the information I got."

"?"

"I used a method you might disapprove of, but I got some of the survivors from Those who Know the Rune of the God's Sword to speak. They acted oddly to the term Gungnir, right? So I thought they must know something." The shop owner spoke quickly. "According to them, the Final Rune is not something you put on an object or a person to simply raise their abilities. Apparently, you carve it on the world itself in order to greatly change the world itself."

"The world…?"

"You carve the rune in a single spot that was worked out by some special equations. Gungnir itself is technically not all that strong. By carving the Final Rune on the world, things are rearranged so that all the spiritual and magical powers in the world are gathered in that spear."

"Then what was that on the wooden board?"

"Who knows. But according to the cabal, the legendary Final Rune is not something you see visually."

The shop owner was not making much sense.

Kanzaki frowned as he continued.

“Norse mythology is not a religion that takes over like Christianity. It’s a good example of a religion that permeates a culture until everyone knows about it despite not knowing when or where they heard about it. …The Final Rune is the same way. Simply put, the rune will just blend into the scenery once it is complete. Not even an expert magician would be able to find it. No one will be able to find this rune that is only a few centimeters big but could be anywhere on this huge planet. In other words, no one will be able to destroy it.”

“And this Final Rune rivals an Original grimoire with a single character.” Kanzaki clicked her tongue as she realized the situation was much worse than she had anticipated. “An Original-class grimoire cannot be destroyed by the techniques of humanity. If the Final Rune really does provide power for Gungnir, it will provide Brunhild with an inexhaustible supply of power once it is complete.”

Kanzaki was bothered by the inconsistency between what she had seen and the information the shop owner had received.

According to the shop owner’s information, the Final Rune was to be carved on the Earth somewhere. But Kanzaki had seen what seemed to be it on that wooden board in Brunhild’s palm.

“…”

Brunhild had said Gungnir was 70% complete.

If the rune on the board was the Final Rune and its completion was linked to the spear’s completion, Gungnir should have already been at 100%. That meant the rune in her palm may not have been the real one.

“The rune in her palm may be some kind of reference material for an automatic writing spiritual item,” said the shop owner. “The rune was supposed to only be known by Odin and only Odin was supposed to be able to carve it. For all we know, it might normally take weeks for a human to carve it. Even using an automatic writing spiritual item, it would take days. Brunhild is completely focusing on fighting you and has shown no sign of working on carving the rune, right? In that case, it is highly likely that she is using an automatic writing spiritual item.”

“…Understood.”

As Kanzaki tried to force down the headache that had still not gone away, she gripped the handle of her sword once more.

“Either way, there is nothing we can do if the Original-class Final Rune is completed. It should not have blended into the scenery making it impossible to find yet since it has not been completed. …I will fight here with Brunhild while also checking for an automatic writing spiritual item in the vicinity. You perform continuous wide area search in case she has set it up elsewhere.”

“One more thing,” the shop owner added. “I’ve found what seems to be the source of Brunhild Eiktobel’s hatred.”

“…”

“Half a year ago, she was attacked and captured by a union of those five cabals. Officially, they were attempting to prevent the distortion of Norse society due to the ‘Hel’, but it seems they were actually trying to get information out of her on Gungnir and the Final Rune.”

Kanzaki had heard a portion of that from Brunhild as she remote controlled the man from Those who Know the Rune of the God’s Sword.

But…

“There was a boy of 9 at the time who had looked after Brunhild while they tortured her. His name was Ceillier Flatley. I don’t know what happened between them, but…he is currently in a vegetative state in a Belgian hospital. It was caused by blood loss from slit wrists. Apparently, it was attempted suicide.”

(Ah. Could it be…?)

The Final Rune and Gungnir were just too much for simple revenge. She had the ability to kill them at any time if she wished, but she had instead spent a long time preparing those.

“It seems to have become a bit of an urban legend at the hospital. They say a bloody woman showed up in the middle of the night with an emergency patient and that his hospital fees are accurately paid from some unknown bank account.”

A Valkyrie.

A being who freely passed between the world of the gods and the world of men and who acted in accordance to the gods’ orders.

But there was one major difference between a Norse Valkyrie and a Christian Saint or angel.

“Brunhild Eiktobel is using Gungnir and the Final Rune, both of which only Odin is allowed to use.”

“Why are you bringing that up again?”

“Do you know why the head god or strongest god in religions old, new, East, and West has his power?”

“Ahn?”

“It is to save something.”

Suddenly, a bit of strange noise was mixed into the transmission through the spiritual item. Immediately afterwards, the jeans shop owner’s voice disappeared and a female voice cut in.

“Peeping and speaking behind people’s backs. Those are not good habits.”

The half-destroyed plant 500 meters away that Kanzaki and Brunhild had been fighting in a bit before suddenly exploded from the inside. Instead of a pure explosion, it was more like a volcanic eruption. Concrete that had been melted by extreme heat sent orange splitting through the black of the night sky.

Brunhild Eiktobel.

That Valkyrie raised the three meter lance up so it stuck vertically above her head and stared straight at Kanzaki.

“I crushed the five cabals and destroyed their research material so as not to leave behind any unnecessary hints. I decided you would be unable to decipher what was going on, but I suppose I should have been a bit more thorough and destroyed the depths of their minds as well.”

“…”

“But it is still too late for you to do anything. The Final Rune is not yet complete, but you cannot stop it before it is complete when you cannot even find where it is being carved.”

“You seem to be underestimating the strength of Necessarius. No matter where in the world it is being carved, we can immediately put together a force to deal with it. If not, we could not function as an international anti-magician organization.”

“Oh?” Brunhild’s voice was enough for Kanzaki to envision the smile that must have been on her face. “Even if it is being carved into the core of the planet?”

“…What…?”

Kanzaki’s eyes naturally moved to the orange glow of the lava that seemed to be permeating the entire landscape.

It was not the pure white lava that was produced by the spear. It was the natural lava that had been there since before her attack.

She had found it odd that it was overflowing like that with no active volcano around, but…

“The Final Rune that only Odin knows or can use changes the state of the planet when it is carved into the planet.”

Since Brunhild was not trying to hide that, she must have been confident it could not be destroyed.

“So there is no more suitable place. Why was that rune said to only be usable by Odin? It was not because the rune was extremely complex. It was because the Norse people of the time could not come up with a way of interfering with the area that it had to be carved in.”

The center of the planet.

The core of the Earth.

Kanzaki analyzed what that would require, but then she shook her head. She had concluded that Brunhild’s thinking was not normal. She did not think it was that simple.

“That is impossible… It is 35 kilometers from the surface of the Earth to the mantle and it is over 6370 kilometers to the center. I doubt that any human can reach that far.”

People simply referred to the “center of the Earth” as a whole, but that included many things from the liquid mantle to the iron and nickel that had been hardened by gravity. Even the “core” had a solid mass in the center of melted iron and nickel.

Merely splitting open the surface of the Earth and arriving at the surface of the mantle may have been possible.

But the layer after that was simply too large and hot.

Inside were the constantly moving flows of molten rock and the masses of rock that had been condensed down and prevented from melting by the Earth’s massive gravity. Those were not something that could be conquered by the humans who lived clinging to the surface of the planet Earth.

“Is that so? Necessarius is surprisingly blind. Do you not even know the effective range of your own spiritual items?”

“…?”

“You have boats called marine prisons that transport magical prisoners, right? Doesn’t the spiritual item called the Cape of Good Hope that controls them externally have an effective range of 9000 kilometers?”

“You don’t mean…!?”

Thinking back, the loss of control of the marine prison had involved a spell using a giant ship from Norse mythology called Naglfar.

Could it be?

Could Brunhild have been involved in that incident behind the scenes? Had she used the loss of control of the marine prison as a chance to analyze the workings of the Cape of Good Hope from a distance?

A range of 9,000 kilometers.

With such a large range, she could carry out magical work 6370 kilometers away at the center of the Earth.

“But the Cape of Good Hope was protected by some of the strongest of Necessarius’s security! Even if you were involved in the marine prison incident, it would be impossible for you to get the details of the Cape of Good Hope!!”

“Even the strongest security is not absolute. Everything has a way past it. That was why I contacted a restraint craftsman and taught myself the basics of his techniques without him noticing.”

(Ellasone…!?)

That restraint craftsman’s objective had been to truly save a girl from the system of human trafficking. He had also used a Norse spell despite being a craftsman who normally used all kinds of magical restraints.

After Ellasone had disappeared, Necessarius had been worried that information on his techniques could be used by a third party to get through all kinds of Necessarius security including that in the Tower of London.

In that case, the Cape of Good Hope would be no exception.

“With that, I obtained the range I needed,” Brunhild Eiktobel continued. “The means of interfering with the Earth’s core was simple. The outer core flowing around the true core is a high temperature liquid made up of molten iron and nickel and its flow is created by the Earth’s magnetic field. In other words, by calculating back from the magnetic force leaking out to the surface, affecting that outer core is not too difficult. Of course, magical assistance was essential,” she said. “By creating a certain regularity to the flow of the liquid outer core, I can freely carve into the surface of the solid inner core just like a river wearing away the earth. By repeating that process, I can carve the rune I want.”

That was the Final Rune.

The strongest rune that could be carved only by the god who had complete control over the Earth’s weather.

However, something seemed off about that explanation to Kanzaki.

The explanation seemed to have left the realm of magic.

“So something seems off to you? I felt the same way,” said Brunhild seeming to have read Kanzaki’s mind. “I wondered if using the scientific parameters of the geology would cause some kind of rejection reaction despite being used to optimize the use of our magic. I was worried, so I had a magician named Leasic check on it for me. …He ended up succeeding in constructing rune magic using scientific laser technology. Even when science and magic are mixed together, it seems the field of runes still functions properly.”

“…”

Leasic was the name of the magician who had attacked the steelworks in Denmark.

Kanzaki started thinking that the Ymir’s Ocean girl, who had tried to protect the Micronesian Uphill Island, and Orlentz, who had tried to create Original armor using a grimoire, may have played a part in helping Brunhild develop her technique.

The flow of clouds and seawater was related to the rotation of the Earth and therefore to the movement of the liquid material inside the planet. It was possible that a global view of that flow could allow one to determine the flow of the fluid within the planet.

“Did you make contact with an artificially created Alfar in Scotland?”

“I didn’t do that, but I did contact a magician who was trying to create an Alfar. Gungnir is not something that was meant to be used by humans, so I thought I might need an existence like Alfar to use it. …But when I checked on the bodily structure of the Alfar that was under construction, I realized that was not likely.”

Thinking back, the magicians she had fought had all seemed on a level where they could actually fight a Saint like Kanzaki.

Kanzaki Kaori could move at supersonic speeds and use a spell that could slice apart a monotheistic angel. Normally, most magicians would be defeated without even being able to bring forth their own power when faced with someone like that. Their bodies would be pulverized before they could get used to that power…that speed.

Nevertheless, they had done it.

Of course, each of the magicians had been quite skilled in their own right. If not, Necessarius would not have even thought about sending out their treasured Saint.

But what if there was something beyond that?

It was possible Brunhild Eiktobel, a Saint, had given them advice on how to fight another monster like herself. Or she might have shown off her overwhelming battle ability as a Saint to ensure that the "negotiations" with the magicians went quickly.

(In any case…)

That meant the entire string of Norse incidents Kanzaki had been involved in had been connected. Brunhild had been involved in all of them in order to gather the data needed to put together her plan.

No.

Brunhild may have gone even farther than that with her preparations. Kanzaki and the others may have only gotten involved in and resolved a portion of the incidents she had used. It was best to assume that she had gathered 50 or even 100 different pieces of data and had only chosen the most useful ones to use in her plan.

"So what will you do? The Final Rune has not yet been completed. The actual carving of the rune may be occurring in the Earth's core, but the device doing it is located on the surface. If you can find it, you might still be able to stop it."

Brunhild Eiktobel's Final Rune was being carved using the same method as the Cape of Good Hope. However, even if Kanzaki contacted Necessarius and got permission to use the original Cape of Good Hope, she would not be able to interfere with the completion of the Final Rune in the core of the Earth.

Brunhild was not just using the Cape of Good Hope.

Brunhild had only been able to interfere with the Earth's core by putting together various other things as well. Kanzaki doubted that she and the rest of Necessarius could complete a similar spiritual item before the Final Rune was completed even if they frantically started that very second.

And once the Final Rune *was* completed, it was all over.

Once that greatest and most powerful rune was carved, no one would be able to destroy it. Kanzaki had seen the "rough copy" of the Final Rune on the board in Brunhild's palm. That alone had rivaled an Original grimoire. The real one carved on the Earth's core would definitely be a pure Original and no one could destroy an Original grimoire.

"Or you could drop nuclear bombs on every suspicious place in the world. The odds are incredibly low, but you might get lucky and hit the device which would put an end to my plan."

She was clearly just trying to provoke Kanzaki.

However, Kanzaki Kaori did not respond to Brunhild's words.

Brunhild was the source of it all.

If it had not been for her, none of it would have happened.

As that truth came to her mind, Kanzaki's heart was filled with pity rather than anger.

Kanzaki had heard the report from the jeans shop owner, so she knew. Brunhild Eiktobel was yet another who had been cast into tragedy.

Tragedy created more tragedy.

Truly strong people who could create something else out of it did exist, but not all people were that way.

That simple truth squeezed at Kanzaki Kaori's heart.

"A Norse Valkyrie receives orders from the gods and heads down to the world of men."

The Saint and the Valkyrie glared at each other from a distance of 500 meters.

To them, that distance was nothing more than a step away from a sure kill.

"But her nature is completely different from that of a Christian angel which is nothing more than a mechanical messenger that obeys its programming. Valkyries are said to occasionally fall in love with people on the Earth, despair at being unable to be with them, and take personal revenge for the sake of the one they love."

Brunhild's eyebrows twitched ever so slightly.

Kanzaki Kaori's voice continued like the flowing wind.

"You are one of those Valkyries, aren't you?"

They had the tips of their weapons pointed at each other and could begin a fight to the death in an instant, but Kanzaki's words had a melancholic ring to them.

"The center of this hateful revenge does not lie within you yourself. You began to crave even the power of the strongest god in Norse mythology for a reason outside yourself."

Kanzaki breathed in and breathed out.

After that slight pause, she continued.

"It started out as something simple."

Brunhild remained silent.

However, she could not lower her spear.

“You wanted to the save the boy in the vegetative state, Ceillier Flatley. To forcibly grant that wish which would normally be impossible, you went as far as attempting to obtain the power of Odin. That was all it was.”

“…A Valkyrie, hm?” Brunhild muttered.

Her mouth loosened weakly, but the expression it showed was definitely not a smile.

“Isn’t that just great? All I am is a loser. I was supposedly chosen by the gods, but I’m just a fucking loser that cannot even protect the smile of a small child.”

A creaking sound could be heard.

It was the sound of the spear being gripped with superhuman strength. The noise did not come through the communications spiritual item. It reached Kanzaki’s ears directly across the 500 meter distance.

“But I am a stubborn loser.”

The target of her hatred was likely at herself.

And Brunhild Eiktobel would continue on as far as it took because she had the strength to not have just stopped there in the first place.

“I will complete Gungnir and use its power to awaken that boy. This is the power of the greatest god. It has to be enough to perform a miracle like that.”

She wished to save that boy who had been on the receiving end of such irrational violence.

Her desire to see his smile just once more was great enough for her to bare her fangs against even the greatest of the gods she believed in.

She was a Valkyrie.

A Valkyrie was given special power by the gods. A Valkyrie wished to carry out that mission, but would also occasionally fight for the sake of humans sometimes to the point of destroying herself.

But…

“…It will not work.”

Kanzaki Kaori slowly shook her head.

It pained her greatly to force out those words, but she had to say them. Kanzaki had her reasons why she had to.

“That method will likely fail. Once he has been put in a vegetative state by having his mind fatally shattered, Ceillier Flatley cannot be completely healed even with Gungnir.”

“How can you know that?”

A murderous aura expanded all at once because Kanzaki had touched on the core of Brunhild’s driving force.

“How can someone like you say that!? How can someone who does not know the irrational suffering that boy had to continually deal with say that!? How can you claim to know that he will never smile again!?”

“Because I understand.”

In that instant, Kanzaki Kaori poured her power to the limit into the hand holding Shichiten Shichitou.

A strange creaking noise reverberated through the plant.

“That is a path we all must go down.”

She resented that saying that was all she could do.

But Kanzaki knew that Brunhild Eiktobel would make a fall she could not recover from if she did not say them, so she continued.

“What you are trying to do is a path that all Saints like us must go down.”

Part 5

Brunhild Eiktobel.

She held the Christian talent of a Saint which fewer than 20 in the world held as well as the rare Norse talent of a Valkyrie.

It was true that she may have been given a more unfortunate life than most anyone else, even most of the other Saints. She had been the target of much jealousy, prejudice, hate, and fear. With all that pointed at her, she had been born into a much more negative life than a normal person.

But what she was currently trying to do, heading down the wrong path to protect and save one she cared for, was not all that rare a thing.

It had nothing to do with her talent as a Valkyrie.

Even a mere Saint had the same thought at least once.

There were fewer than 20 of them.

Since they were born with such rare qualities, Saints were always on the receiving end of negative emotions to a certain extent. Most people revered them on the surface, but many of those people resented them in secret for having such an irregular position and those people tried to eliminate them in various ways.

That was just human nature.

And oftentimes it was not just the Saints themselves who got wrapped up in that ugly nature.

For example, the few people that understood them were often affected.

It could be a friend, a lover, a parent, a sibling, or a companion they fought alongside. Those people had managed to shake free of all the ridiculous prejudices and truly contacted the Saint. In doing so, they proved to be much, much stronger people than the Saints, but their physical bodies were still those of normal people.

What would happen if a trap meant to kill a Saint was sprung on one of those people?

Most of the shallow strategies were not actually sufficient to kill a Saint. If a Saint could be killed by things of that level, they would not be as honored as they were. Saints were seen as such special existences because they could not be harmed by anything on a normal level.

But the people around them were different.

The Saints would manage to just barely slip past the trap and the few who understood them, who they were supposed to protect with their lives, would be dead.

What would the Saints think then?

Would they just say it was “fate” and give up?

Of course not.

How could they give up?

That feeling erupted especially strong within them *because* they were Saints. They had bodily characteristics similar to the Son of God, so they could draw out and use a portion of his power. Because they had that ability, they would begin seriously thinking about absurd plans that would allow them to miraculously save the people they cared about.

For example, the story of the Son of God raising the dead was well known.

They knew that story.

They knew a portion of that power was contained within their own bodies.

And most importantly, they knew the smile of the few precious people who cared about them.

There was no way they would just give up without trying it.

They were called Saints by the people around them, but their actions opposed the image that word gave. They would store up their power for completely personal reasons, put together all sorts of detailed plans, and faithfully and accurately carry out each and every one. And in the end, they all despaired.

Yes.

They failed.

No matter what theory the plan was based on and no matter what Saint carried it out, the people whose bodies or minds had been utterly destroyed were never brought back to normal.

A human life was not so simple a thing.

They had treated it with such care before for that very reason, but the Saints lost sight of that simple truth at some point as they tried to bring one back.

After trying everything they had, wearing their bodies down, and offering up everything they could, the problem would still remain unresolved. This brought despair to the depths of their hearts and the Saints would finally come to terms with the death of the ones they cared about. Kanzaki Kaori understood all that.

After all, she herself had gone down that path just like everyone else.

That was why it saddened her.

She understood that Brunhild Eiktobel's lamentation, her yearning that she wished to fulfill no matter what, would surely end in failure. The statistical data from the many similar experiences showed that no slight error of a miracle would occur.

In that case, there was something Kanzaki Kaori had to do.

Nothing could be done about it.

However, the one Brunhild cared about had not left nothing at all behind.

There was something Kanzaki had to do in order to prove that to her.

Part 6

Brunhild Eiktobel stopped moving for only a few seconds.

She then started breathing again and muttered a few words.

“A path…we all go down…?”

“Yes. It is almost to the point of being an established theory. It is a simple matter. It is merely difficult for us to see because of the special things we possess. People whose bodies or minds have been utterly destroyed cannot be revived by anyone. In this, there is no distinction between those with special skills and normal people. It is such a straightforward matter, that there are no exceptions.”

“Fuck that.” Her rebuttal began. Her condescending tone made it clear she did not want to hear anymore. “Fuck that!! So you’re telling me to give up just because everyone has failed in the past? You’re telling me to give up because that means there’s no way I can do it? If I could accept that, I never would have started this in the first place!! Those are your and everyone else’s failures. They have no effect on what I am about to do. I am not just a mere Saint. I can approach this from a different angle than you all by combining the powers of a Valkyrie, Gungnir, and the Final Rune!!!!!”

Kanzaki Kaori slowly shook her head.

She already knew Brunhild’s theory would fail.

“Norse mythology is a religion that affirms death.” She hesitated to cut in, but she had to go through with it. “At the final battle of Ragnarok, Odin and all the other gods die along with their enemies. There is no way a religion like that has a technique to revive others. If it was possible, Ragnarok would not be the end of the mythology.”

Even if she obtained the power of the most powerful god, it meant nothing if that god had no way to save Ceillier Flatley.

“Liar.”

Brunhild’s spear shook slightly.

That shaking spear was a symbol of the shaking of her conviction.

“There is food that gives one eternal life in Norse mythology! The gods are said to live to the end of the world without aging by eating the apples cultivated by the goddess Iðunn!! Norse mythology has to have techniques of interfering with life itself!!”

“That is nothing more than making the cycle of an existing life continue eternally. It is true that recreating that by human means would change history forever, but it would be of no use in this instance. That technique cannot restart a life that has already ended.”

“Thor’s weapon, Mjölnir, has the power to resurrect the two goats that pull his chariot! He is said to be able to return them to normal even if they have been turned to nothing but bones by merely raising Mjölnir above his head!!”

“Those goats were given the role of being an eternal food source, they are merely having the lost meat restored to them!! Do you truly think that can save this boy!? If you recreated that, you would only cause the boy’s body to expand never-endingly while he remained in his vegetative state!!”

“Then what do you want me to do?” Brunhild gritted her teeth. “I have to save Ceillier Flatley no matter what!! It was because of me that he met that misfortune!! These detestable abilities of a Saint and a Valkyrie were part of me ever since I was born!! I did not ask for them!! Because of them, that boy was driven to death!! That’s why I have to try to save him no matter what. That is the clear mission that has been given to me!!”

“Do you…” Kanzaki’s words had a slight bit of anger hidden behind them. “Do you truly think this is what that boy would want?”

“Don’t you dare speak for him!!” Brunhild’s anger exploded out on the surface. “No one would want to end up like that! If he had never met me, he would never have been driven to that point!! It’s only natural that he would resent me. And yet he has been stolen even the freedom to hold that grudge!! What is wrong with wanting to give that back to him!?”

“Then…”

Kanzaki inhaled a short breath.

She then spoke.

She spoke the truth of the mistake Brunhild Eiktobel was making.

“Do you intend to sully the bonds you made with him by using them as a reason to kill!?”

Slightly, ever so slightly, Brunhild’s movements stopped.

Kanzaki continued on regardless.

Every Saint had to head down that path. She had to ensure that Valkyrie did not head too far down it.

“Once you use his memory in that way even once, you will never again be able to think back on those memories properly. Does that not matter to you? That boy may never awaken, but some things should never be trampled on!! Do you truly want to continue with this hopeless challenge even though it will sully his memory with the red of blood!?”

Nothing could be done about it, but it was something that had to be said.

“That boy may never open his mouth again, but that is exactly why you must not trample on his feelings. The dead cannot speak for themselves. You are using that fact to come up with your own words for him…ones that are convenient for you. That way, you can be moved by what are actually your own words, allowing you to hurt others and yet feel no guilt. Do you truly intend to transform the feelings that boy left behind into such an unsightly tool!?”

“Are you…?” Brunhild’s question seemed to almost be a groan. “Are you saying that was enough to convince you? You headed down this same path, but that was enough to convince to you give up and accept the death of your comrades?”

“Yes,” Kanzaki nodded. “The few people that understood me were truly strong people. That is why I did not want to twist their memory for my own purposes.”

“…”

Brunhild fell silent.

The tip of her spear shook slightly. Brunhild held the qualities of both a Saint and a Valkyrie, so there was no way she was having difficulty supporting the spear’s weight. The shaking of the tip displayed her mental state.

Kanzaki heard long, thin breaths being transmitted over the communications spiritual item.

That breathing was a technique to calm one’s mind.

Kanzaki felt she might have succeeded in stopping her.

She felt Brunhild Eiktobel might stop there before the battle had to come to a final conclusion.

But…

I'm sorry.

A certain boy's smile floated up in the back of Brunhild's mind.

"Aah…"

It was for just an instant.

However, that instant was enough for that face that had been utterly lost to eat into her entire body. Something like a thick liquid filled her from the center of her brain to the tips of her fingers and toes.

She should have been able to save that life.

She should have saved that life.

(Stop.)

As Kanzaki Kaori had said, there was no more point in fighting any longer. It was already over. She truly knew that fact. She simply did not want to accept it. Such a kind boy would not want anyone else to be harmed in order to save him.

But…

Yet…

Some kind of restraint had broken within her. The boy's voiceless voice seemed to explode from her skull and rip her mind to shreds.

I'm sorry I couldn't save you.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

Brunhild Eiktobel roared.

At the same time, an unknown power was emitted in all directions with her at the center. It was the magic power that was supposed to be kept within her body. The invisible explosion spread out in a dome shape, passed Kanzaki in an instant, and swallowed up everything as it headed farther and farther away.

A prickling pain covered Kanzaki's skin. It felt like she had been struck by a shockwave. That pain was known only by a magician that could detect magic power. That strange situation caused a strange cold sweat to cover Kanzaki, one of the fewer than 20 Saints in the world.

As if in response, the ground split open even wider than before.

The cracks split the ground open like a spider web and glowing orange lava spewed forth. It was not the pure white lava that had been produced by the spear. The lava had lost its divine light and now had the color of pure rage. The dark of the night was swept away and the distinctive smell of sulfur filled the area. The red burning night looked like the end of the world. During the final battle of Norse mythology, Ragnarok, the world tree which connected the 9 worlds was said to be burned away, which would burn away all that had been built up within that culture. The Valkyrie's rage had reached that level. Kanzaki had no choice but to feel that sorrow of hers that would destroy everything.

"He apologized…" said Brunhild's voice over the spiritual item.

Fresh blood flowed from her body.

However, it did not come from just one place.

It came from her face, her arms, her legs, her chest, her stomach, and her side. Her skin tore all over her body and dark red liquid flowed out.

A Saint exceeded the upper limits of a normal human's strength.

By making a mistake in controlling that strength, they would harm their own bodies. It was quite a risk even for someone who was only a Saint. Brunhild was both a Saint and a Valkyrie, so she had to control her mental state even more delicately.

Brunhild Eiktobel was now ignoring all of that.

With her mind overcome with powerful emotion, the restraints protecting her body had been destroyed.

"At the very end, he left a note apologizing. Apologizing for failing to save me! That was what he was thinking up to the moment he slit his wrists!!"

A bloody Valkyrie.

That was who would appear when a warrior died and would bring his soul to Valhalla.

Brunhild Eiktobel's appearance now matched that role.

“I should have been able to save him. If my power had been perfect, I would have been able to!! If I had not had the characteristics of a Saint and was merely a Valkyrie, I could have!! I should have been able to save him from those cabals!!”

The stench of blood reached Kanzaki from the distance.

The massive amount of magic power and the thick scent of blood transformed the air into a bloodthirsty atmosphere.

It was a Norse stench.

The atmosphere of the battlefield was colored by the religion ruled by Odin, a warrior god who ruled over death and war.

But…

“You idiot…”

Kanzaki Kaori gritted her back teeth.

She gripped Shichiten Shichitou’s handle so tightly she thought she would break it.

“A child who would say that at the very, very end would not want to see you like this!! He must have felt so much self-condemnation because he was unable to save you from becoming like this! Do you intend to trample on his feelings yourself!?”

Kanzaki shouted, but her words did not reach Brunhild.

No, the Valkyrie actually understood. She understood, but she could not stop.

Valkyries were given special power in order to carry out the orders of the gods, but they held such strong emotion that they would fall in love and even turn their backs on the gods. Even if they had to drive a sharp sword through their own chest, they would unhesitatingly give up their life for the one they loved.

That nature of hers would not allow her to stop.

Brunhild Eiktobel could not stop her desire to save a certain boy even as she knew she would be burned by hellfire.

Kanzaki would not let that happen.

This was not a scenario someone had written. Kanzaki Kaori declared war on the terrible flow of events that had allowed a series of coincidences to pile up and give rise to the current situation.

In response to her anger, massive power rose within Kanzaki's body. It was the power of a Christian Saint. That overwhelming power flowed into her body because she had bodily characteristics similar to the Son of God.

For a brief moment, both of them remained silent.

It only lasted a few seconds. The calm amid the powerful emotions was similar to the strange area of still air created within the complex whirling winds of a storm.

There was no physical sign of when it began.

Because of that complete silence, the two of them could hear a ringing in their ears.

That became the sign.

An explosive noise exploded out.

Kanzaki Kaori and Brunhild Eiktobel exploded out from the asphalt at their feet in order to fill the 500 meters between them at their greatest speed.

It did not take even 2 seconds for them to meet in the middle.

However, Brunhild swung Gungnir through empty air before their blades actually clashed. It influenced the weather that was the symbol of Odin's power. That spear could control lightning, floods, earthquakes, tornados, volcanic eruptions, and any other natural disaster as a weapon.

The pure white disasters attacked.

Dozens of stones appeared out of thin air.

Each giant mass was over 5 meters and corresponded to the disasters of falling rocks or a landslide.

However, neither Kanzaki nor Brunhild stopped.

As the stones rained down, the two of them accelerated further and further as they darted through the slight gaps between the stones. Finally, they clashed at the center. Kanzaki's sword and Brunhild's spear struck, causing sparks to fly through the air.

The two weapons knocked each other back a few centimeters.

Immediately afterwards, their bodies blurred.

The sound of clashing metal continued seemingly infinitely and sparks exploded out. As Gungnir was swung, pure white flames erupted and violent winds blew about like sharp blades. Each strike held a disaster and gave more weight to each of Brunhild's attacks. Her chain of attacks held the majesty of natural disasters and would leave anyone who saw it paralyzed with fear.

But Kanzaki did not stop.

She unhesitatingly kept up the attack.

Every disaster that Brunhild created originated from the movements of her spear. Norse mythology had no simple four great elements, but she was likely producing the various phenomena by mixing together the magical symbols of fire, ice, and frost. In the world of Norse mythology, winds flowing from the land of fire and the land of ice collided creating frost. That frost gave birth to the frost giant known as Ymir who became the material the current world was created from. Those three things could be seen as the elements from which the world was constructed.

That was a mixture of three symbols.

A trinity.

Once more, a Christian magic symbol had found its way in, likely without Brunhild intending for it to.

Most likely, that symbol was nothing more than an impurity that would reduce her power as a Valkyrie.

In that, Kanzaki Kaori saw her way out.

(...!!)

With a great noise, they locked blades.

With blade biting into blade, Kanzaki and Brunhild glared at each other. A look of doubt found its way onto the Valkyrie's face. It was caused by the fact that Kanzaki had been the one to initiate that locking of blades.

"Did you forget?" asked the Valkyrie as she adjusted her grip on the spear. "A legend exists where Odin's spear broke the great sword Balmung in a single strike. Your sword will be easily broken like this and the next strike will surely defeat you."

"Not necessarily," responded Kanzaki Kaori with a thin smile. "You are the one that is forgetting something. When your power as a Norse Valkyrie is at its absolute strongest, it weakens your nature as a Christian Saint. So what would happen if I was to forcibly raise your characteristics as a Saint?"

"...!?"

Brunhild seemed to have realized something, but it was too late.

Like the waxing and waning of the moon, her power changed over a three month cycle. Her powers as a Christian Saint and a Norse Valkyrie were in conflict with each other. When one was at its strongest, Brunhild could wield power greater than a normal person, but when they cancelled each other out, she had no more power than a normal person.

"Know this."

Brunhild had chosen to carry out her plan during the time when she could wield her power as a Valkyrie at its fullest.

However, even while she could keep things balanced on her own, a Saint like Kanzaki could add on another weight and greatly alter Brunhild's scales.

"When I was a more miserable existence, I had a thought. ...There are stories of the Son of God bringing the dead back to life. And the Son of God himself rose from the dead three days after he was executed. A portion of that power flows through me, so I thought I might be able to bring my dead companions back to life if I could construct special recovery magic based on that power rather than on normal magic power."

Brunhild's power lessened.

It was caused by the locked blades.

Kanzaki had adjusted the angle at which the sword and spear met to create the symbol of a cross. She sent her power as a Saint through that and into Brunhild.

Most likely, it was in the form of the special recovery magic that had failed in the past.

Even if it could heal the wounds of the living, the spell could not heal the souls of the dead.

She used it in order to truly heal the deep wounds within Brunhild Eiktobel.

"Kh...!!"

Brunhild immediately released the spear's weapon destroying power in an attempt to break Kanzaki's sword. However, she could not get the command across properly. She was losing her power as a Valkyrie.

And...

Kanzaki removed one hand from the handle of her sword and reached for the oddly long scabbard at her waist. That black scabbard could deliver a blow that greatly outdid a normal metal bat.

Because she let go of her sword with one hand, the balance of the locked swords was lost.

Brunhild Eiktobel immediately regained control of Gungnir. Half her power had been stolen, but she wielded her spear to the end in an attempt to defeat her enemy.

Scabbard and spear.

The two weapons crossed.

I'm sorry.

Ceillier Flatley's final words floated up in the back of Brunhild Eiktobel's mind.

I'm sorry I couldn't save you.

"Me, too," Brunhild muttered quietly.

In truth, she had understood it all from the beginning.

A great impact reverberated through the core of her body.

Part 7

"So what are you gonna do?" asked the jeans shop owner.

A great number of Necessarius magicians had gathered at the mineral water plant. They were there to retrieve Brunhild Eiktobel who was unconscious. She was one of the world's fewer than 20 Saints just like Kanzaki. Retrieving and transporting her had to be carried with as much care as with a nuclear weapon.

Kanzaki Kaori sat at a slight distance from the team carrying that out.

She slowly looked up.

"What do you mean?"

"Before they arrived, you broke and threw away the incomplete Gungnir, right? Well, it's true that, due to its link with the Final Rune, that succeeded in destroying the rune before it was completed."

“Yes. To completely rob Brunhild of her power, I had to destroy both of them.”

“But Necessarius isn’t going to stay quiet about that. That was a very powerful spiritual item. I’m betting they wanted it in order to strengthen their armaments.”

“It would do them no good. Only one with the special characteristics of a Valkyrie could use it. And even if it could be customized so anyone could use it, that would just create new seeds of conflict.” Kanzaki sighed. “We can make up for it by doing our job properly.”

“Don’t make it sound so simple. I’m just a virtuous jeans shop owner.” The shop owner scratched at his head. “Dammit. I guess we have no choice but to resolve any troublesome problems as quickly as possible. I want to just get back to London and burn through my backlogged internet orders in order to put middle school Saten-chan back in a good mood…but there’s something we have to do first.”

“?”

“That boy in the vegetative state, Ceillier Flatley was it? Well, something bothered me about the fact that he wouldn’t recover.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s not all that complex. Brunhild Eiktobel put spells on the magicians of the cabals she crushed so recovery magic and their natural healing would not work, remember? In other words, that was Norse magic. I was thinking that it might not have been Brunhild’s magic originally.”

“…You mean someone is intentionally preventing that boy from awakening?”

“It’s really damn likely that it was another kind of harassment they used while torturing Brunhild. And without knowing that magic had been used to make the kid suffer, Brunhild ironically used the same type of magic on the people from the cabals that had come up with it in the first place. But that would mean there is a way of saving him.”

Of course, if Ceillier Flatley was truly in a vegetative state, nothing could be done for him. However, if it was merely due to magical interference, things were different. If the magic was eventually removed, the sleeping boy could possibly be healed.

“It may look like a happy end is coming, but the truly annoying part is yet to come,” said the jeans shop owner with a sigh. “Necessarius is thinking of getting Brunhild to tell them about Gungnir, the Final Rune, the method of interfering with the core of the Earth, and the nature of a Valkyrie. But her time in captivity shows that simple methods like torture will not be enough to get information from her.”

“You don’t mean…”

Kanzaki’s expression changed and she stood up.

The shop owner merely shrugged and said, “It seems a group of them want to retrieve the boy from the hospital so they can ‘negotiate’ with her more effectively.”

It must have really pissed him off because the shop owner practically spat out the answer to Kanzaki’s question in a rare moment of seriousness.

“The head of that group is named Richard Brave. He specializes in defensive ocean battles. He’s a suspicious looking guy who uses Norse spells.”

“…”

“That tour guide kid has already searched out the location of the hospital. Given when their mission is set to begin, we might be able to reach the hospital before they do if we head straight there.”

After hearing that, Kanzaki thought.

“What are you gonna do?” asked the shop owner casually. “Are you gonna do it?”

とある魔術の禁書目録SS

8

GNBA-1588
GNXA-1228